

2010 PRO ATHLETE OF THE YEAR ROY HALLADAY



Sporting News

MAGAZINE

14-PAGE BOWL GUIDE

DUAL THREAT

Can Auburn QB Cam Newton's run-pass blast overcome every obstacle—on the field and off—with a national title on the line?

+ PICKS AND PREVIEWS FOR ALL 35 GAMES

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Week of December 20, 2010





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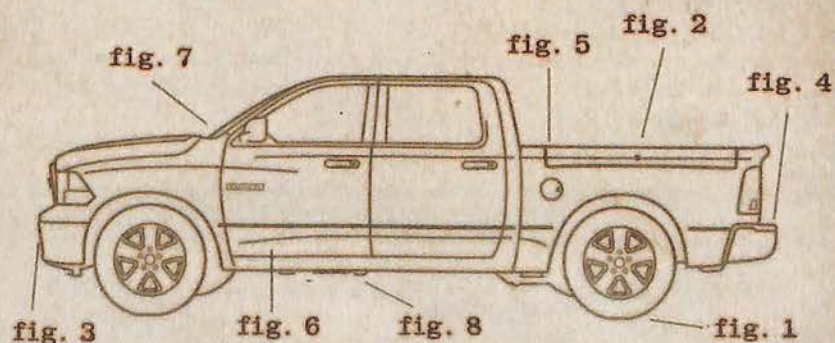
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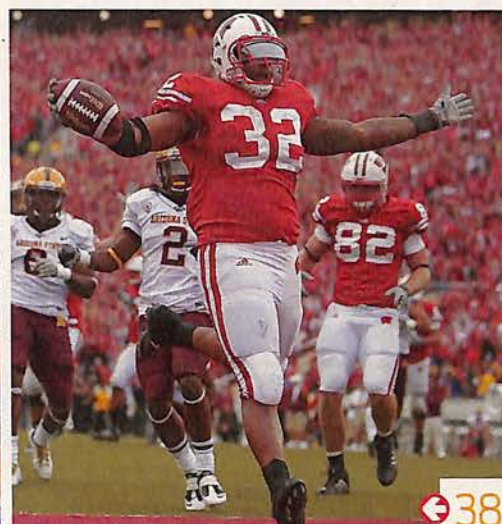


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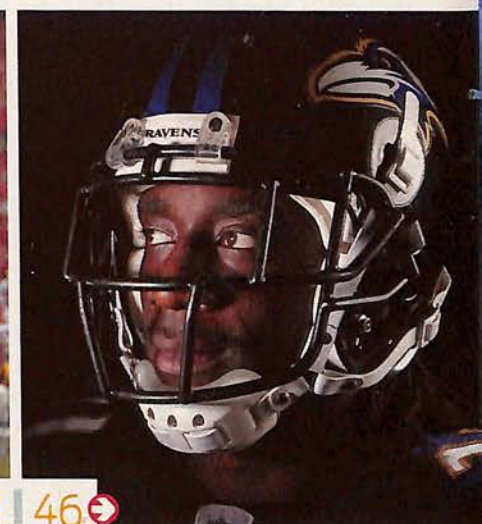
DECEMBER 20, 2010



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COVER

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Cam ... a lot

We've seen (and heard) a great deal this year about Cam Newton, the QB who has Auburn one win from an improbable national title. "I'm not sure I've ever seen anyone make the kind of impact Cam has on this team," Tigers defensive coordinator Ted Roof says.

—BY MATT HAYES

COVER PHOTOGRAPHY
BY PAUL ABELL/
USPRESSWIRE

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FEATURES

22 Athletes of the year

Roy Halladay threw a perfect game in May and a no-hitter in his first playoff start, helping him become SN's pro athlete of the year. "I might someday forget the details of the perfect game, the playoff no-hitter and any other individual moment but never the camaraderie that we had," Halladay says. SN also names its top college and prep athletes. —BY STEVE GREENBERG

35 COLLEGE FOOTBALL: Getting to know Auburn and Oregon

In preparation for the national title game, we examine aspects integral to each team's success. For the Ducks, it all starts with quarterback Darron Thomas, who reminds his coach of former Oregon star Dennis Dixon. "They're very similar," Oregon coach Chip Kelly says, "in their style, leadership and what they mean to this team." —BY DAVE CURTIS AND MATT HAYES

38 COLLEGE FOOTBALL: Bowl guide

The Rose Bowl sets up as a matchup between Wisconsin's running game and TCU's speed. "You'll get yourself in a bad spot if you say, 'Should I go here? Should I go there?'" Northwestern coach Pat Fitzgerald says of defending the Badgers. "You've just got to be aggressive and go." We preview all 34 bowl games that won't determine the title. —BY DAVE CURTIS AND MATT HAYES

PHOTOS

46 Year in preview: 7 for '11

Our annual preview of the year to come features soon-to-be breakout players in each of our seven sports—a list that includes third-year Ravens corner Lardarius Webb: "I'm going to become the Baltimore Ravens' No. 1 cornerback, and I'm working my butt off every day in practice and in the classroom."

SportingNews
MAGAZINEA NOTE TO OUR
READERS

Don't rush to the mailbox in two weeks—because *Sporting News* won't be in it. As we have in the past, we're taking a short vacation. We'll be back on January 17 with the start of our yearlong celebration of SN's 125th anniversary.

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As the NFL playoffs approach, get the most comprehensive preview of the games each Friday. Sign up at sportingnewstoday.com.

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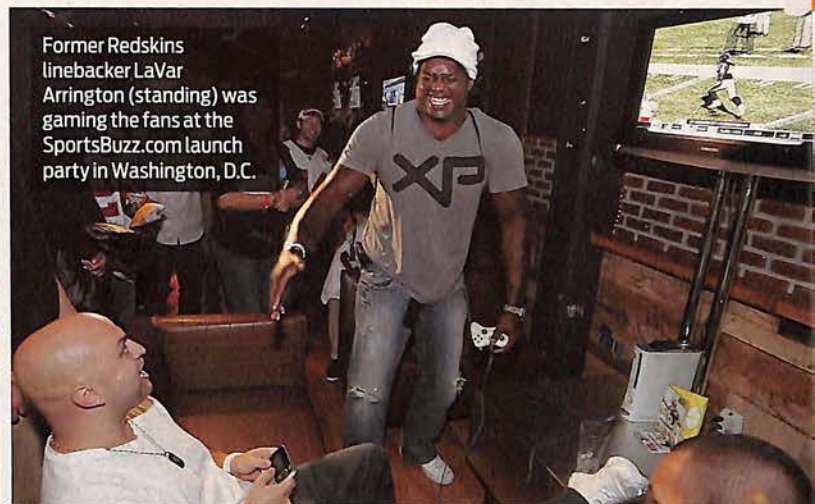
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IN PICTURES



Bernard Berrian—with a little encouragement from Vikings teammate Greg Lewis (left)—gave the kids a lift at Berrian's holiday Turkey Giveaway.



Former Redskins linebacker LaVar Arrington (standing) was gaming the fans at the SportsBuzz.com launch party in Washington, D.C.



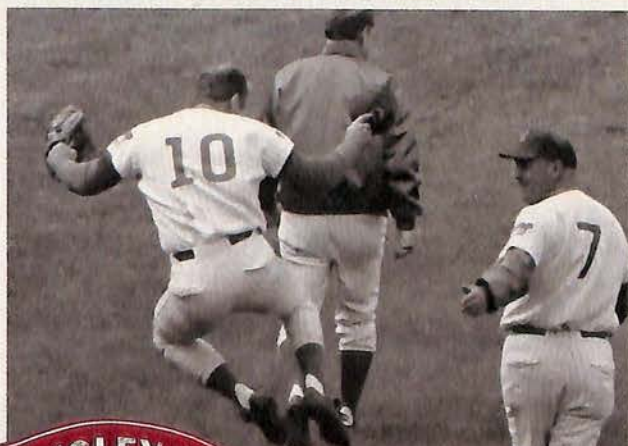
Yankees G.M. Brian Cashman was the elf to be named later in a Stamford, Conn., deal.



Big surprise: Bill Cosby (left) made Tom Brokaw laugh at the College Football Hall of Fame Awards.



Never mind a golden handshake, coach Dan Bylsma (right) gave Bill Guerin a black sweater, honoring him for retiring as a Penguin.



Third baseman-turned-broadcaster Ron Santo—who for decades was a symbol of Chicago on the field and off—died December 2, leaving a hole in the booth and Cubs fans' hearts.

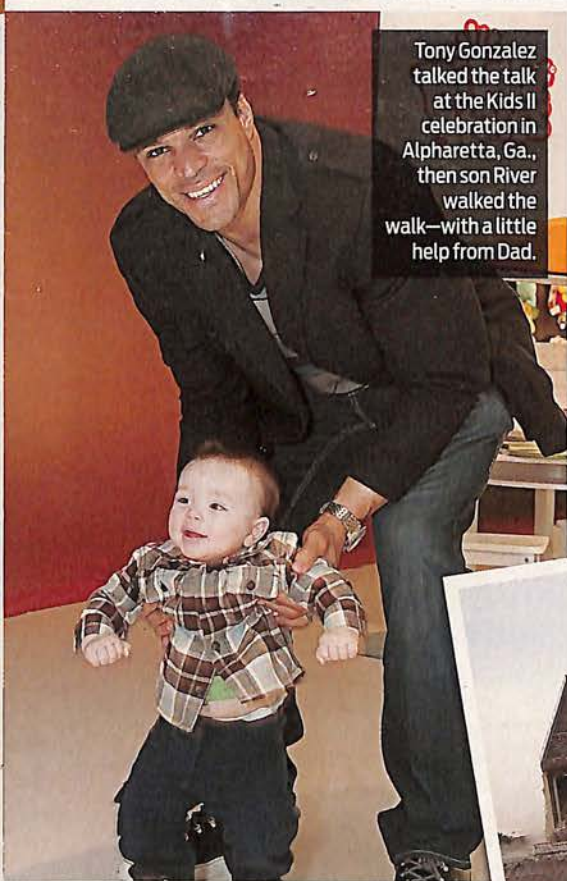


Seahawks Pro Bowl tackle Walter Jones, who in a 12-season NFL career had many a D-lineman's number, saw his (No. 71) retired in Seattle.



Driver Tony Stewart—whose Indiana land already is used for Catch-A-Dream hunting trips—signed a banner partnership with Mississippi State in which the university will study white-tailed deer on the 414 acres.

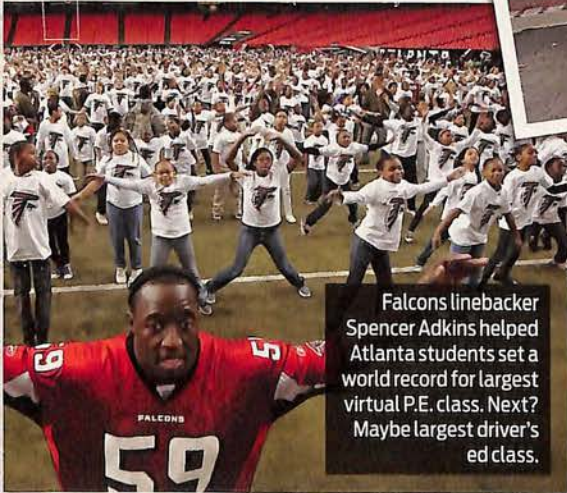
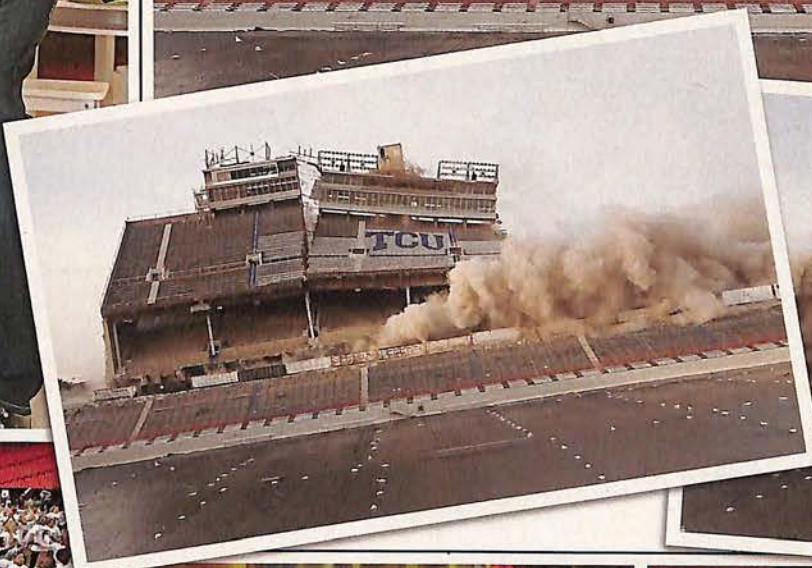




Tony Gonzalez talked the talk at the Kids II celebration in Alpharetta, Ga., then son River walked the walk—with a little help from Dad.



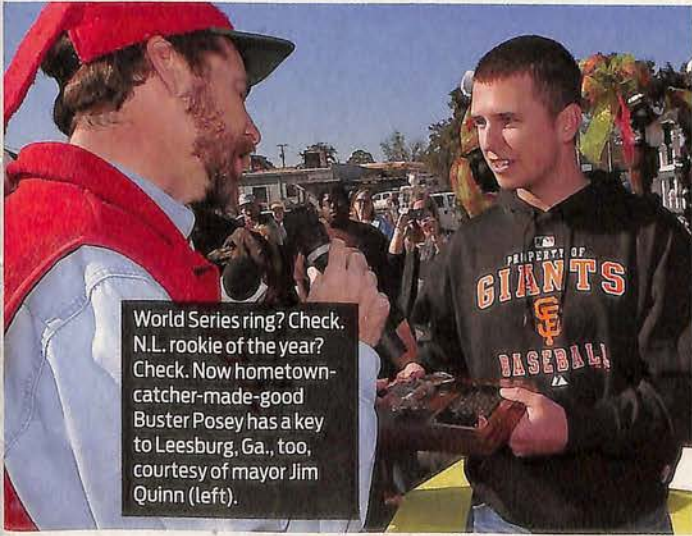
Destroying the evidence on its way to the Big East? Nah, TCU had already planned a massive makeover of 80-year-old Amon G. Carter Stadium, which has seen the likes of Sammy Baugh, Bob Lilly, LaDainian Tomlinson and Andy Dalton. So, in the name of progress ... boom went the dynamite in Fort Worth.



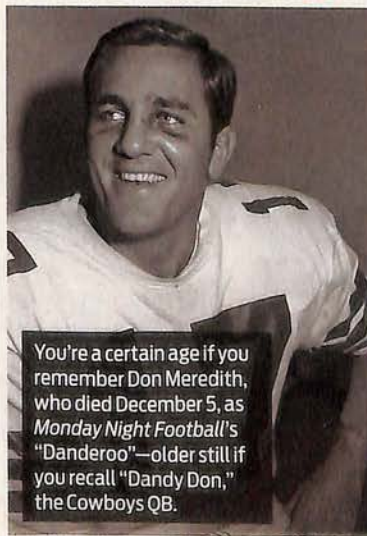
Falcons linebacker Spencer Adkins helped Atlanta students set a world record for largest virtual P.E. class. Next? Maybe largest driver's ed class.



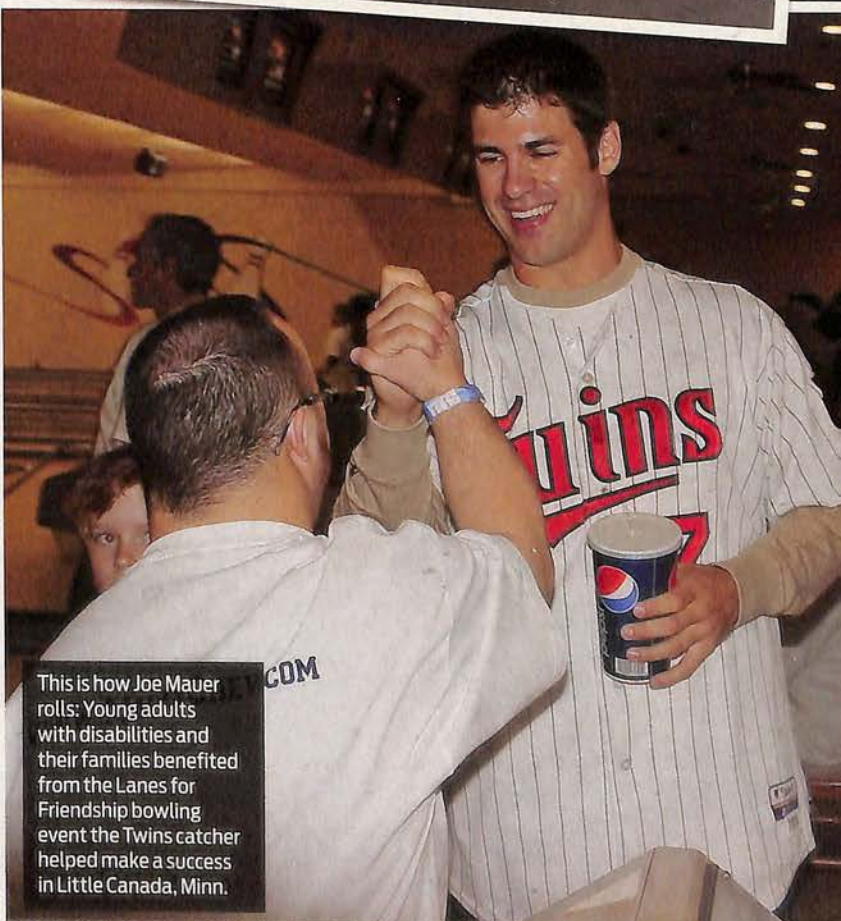
Jimmie Johnson—no mere Carrot Top prop as a five-time Sprint Cup champion—joined the comedian on the Hard Rock stage in Vegas.



World Series ring? Check. N.L. rookie of the year? Check. Now hometown-catcher-made-good Buster Posey has a key to Leesburg, Ga., too, courtesy of mayor Jim Quinn (left).



You're a certain age if you remember Don Meredith, who died December 5, as *Monday Night Football's* "Danderoo"—older still if you recall "Dandy Don," the Cowboys QB.



This is how Joe Mauer rolls: Young adults with disabilities and their families benefited from the Lanes for Friendship bowling event the Twins catcher helped make a success in Little Canada, Minn.

SINCE YOU ASKED ...

You have questions, they have answers

Q What happens in the NHL when both of a team's goalies are hurt in the same game? Is there a designated defenseman who can become the third goalie?

— JEFF FACEMYER,
Sterling Heights, Mich.

A: Ray Shero, Penguins G.M.

Jeff,

I think about that, honestly, once every two months. You're always in that situation where sometimes the goalie gets injured or has to leave. You hope it's not too often. For us, I don't know if it's forward Max Talbot who would be our guy, but coach Dan Bylsma has a go-to guy. It's actually unbelievable it hasn't happened. The replacement guy can put on the pads and mask, and that'd be great, but I can't imagine he can wear goalie skates. That would be a disaster.

Q Earlier this season, why did the national media discuss

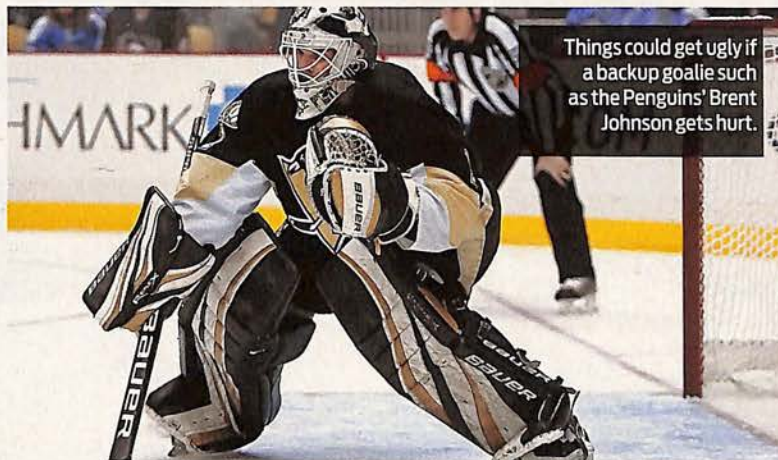
Wisconsin's "running up the score" vs. Indiana so much? When then-Indiana coach Bill Lynch was asked about it, he said he had no problem with it. Oregon has a prolific offense and scored 60 points vs. UCLA in October. They also had a 2-point conversion in the first quarter. Why didn't I hear as much about that?

— KEVIN ZIEGLER,
Madison, Wis.

A: Spencer Tillman,

CBS college football analyst
Kevin,

The national media covered Wisconsin's sudden affinity for scoring because it was a marked departure from what we're accustomed to seeing from a run-oriented program. Eclipsing 70 points three times this season was a clear response to a BCS system that demands its contenders differentiate themselves. The Badgers are not ranked fifth in the regular-season final BCS poll



if they don't; that's the difficult truth.

One additional note: Does this undermine sportsmanship? Yes, in the sense that we traditionally have defined sportsmanship. The BCS has also affected the way contenders coach. That's a related, but separate, topic.

Q Why does it seem that baseballs are replaced what seems like every time they are hit or hit the dirt? I can remember watching Pete Rose bounce the ball off of the carpet in old Veterans Stadium when the inning ended and the pitcher use it the next inning. Now it seems like every time the ball gets the slightest bit dirty, it's replaced. What has changed?

— RICHARD CHALLENGER,
Maryville, Tenn.

A: Mike Teevan, Major League Baseball media relations manager
Richard,

Scuffed or damaged balls are removed from play for safety and playability reasons. All game-used baseballs are rubbed with a special mud prior to being used in order to take the sheen off the ball. This practice makes it easier for the pitcher to grip the ball. The collection of some dirt on a ball is not a major issue, but

when a ball is scuffed or otherwise damaged, it is removed from the game under the premise that damage to the ball might alter a pitcher's control or the flight of the ball. Umpires often defer to pitchers on their preferences on a particular ball as well.

Q When Kevin Everett of the Buffalo Bills suffered his spinal cord injury in 2007, much was made of the fact that he received chilled IV fluids to lower his internal body temperature, which was thought to have helped his recovery. Why is this practice not in place at every football stadium from high school to the pros?

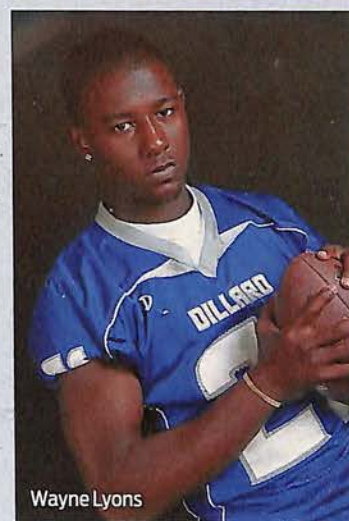
— TODD WELLS,
Lordstown, Ohio

A: Dr. Robert Cantu,
co-founder of Sports Legacy Institute
Todd,

Although Kevin Everett got two units of chilled saline, his temperature was normal when he arrived at the hospital. He underwent urgent surgery that evening. That's what made the difference. He ultimately did undergo spinal cord cooling, but only the next day, after he had had his surgery.

The two cooled units of saline had probably no influence whatsoever. I realize it got a bit of press. But those in the profession realize his temperature was normal when he arrived at the hospital. He was never cooled. You can't cool somebody by giving them two units of cooled saline.

ATHLETE TO ATHLETE



Wayne Lyons

Dillard (Fort Lauderdale, Fla.) defensive back **Wayne Lyons** is No. 22 in the *Sporting News* 100 for 2011. Lyons will play in the U.S. Army All-American game in San Antonio on January 8 and announce his college decision then. In the meantime, he had a question for one of his favorite NFL players:

Q What advice does Davone Bess have for me right now as a young player trying to make it? What is the biggest transition I'll make from high school to college and then from college to the NFL?

A: Davone Bess,
fourth-year Dolphins wide receiver

Wayne,
I hate to make it sound cliché, but you can't take any plays off. You can't take anything for granted. You have to be consistent. If you have a hell of a Day 1 practice but you slack off the next day, it's going to be noticed. You need to constantly impress with skill and consistency. The speed of the game is going to increase at every level. But with hard work and constant preparation, you can grow more comfortable in those situations.



Davone Bess

Write us

Got something you'd like to ask a player, coach or executive, past or present? Let us know at Facebook.com/sportingnews, follow us on Twitter @sportingnews or e-mail your question to bhille@sportingnews.com. We'll choose our favorites and get them answered every issue in this space.



MY PROFILE

(What you won't find on Facebook ... even if you are approved as a friend)

Chipper Jones

Braves third baseman

➤ **What's on TV:** ESPN, *Friends*, NCIS, MLB Network, college football, basketball or baseball

➤ **In my iPod:** Jason Aldean, Luke Bryan, Nickelback, Rascal Flatts, T.I., Rihanna, Kenny Chesney, Jay-Z

➤ **What I drive:** 2009 blue F-150 with flared wheel wells, side steps and a 6-inch lift

➤ **Favorite flicks:** *A Few Good Men*, the Bourne movies, *Bull Durham*, *For Love of the Game*, *Hoosiers* and Tom Clancy book movies

➤ **What I'm reading:** Anything about American history, JFK or Vietnam

➤ **Magazine subscriptions:** 10 subscriptions to *Sporting News* so I have a copy in every room! (Shameless plug.)

➤ **Bookmarks:** espn.com, buckcommander.com, basspro.com, mizunousa.com, floridagators.com, outdoorchannel.com, thesportsmanchannel.com, cabelas.com, atlantabraves.com

➤ **Superstitions:** Not many of these. Make sure I kiss my kids and wife goodbye before I head to the park.

➤ **Worst habit:** Dipping

➤ **On my office walls:** I have a ton of sports memorabilia—I have a HOF QB room with all the great ones' signed jerseys—Manning, Marino, Elway, Montana, Brady, Unitas, Favre. Dozens of signed bats from guys I like and respect. Helmets from every NFL team. Some signed Urban Meyer memorabilia. Stuff from Bobby, Smoltzie, Glav and Doggie (Greg Maddux).

➤ **Would love to trade places for a day with ...** John F. Kennedy

➤ **My first job:** Not very glamorous, but it taught me about how to work. My hometown (Pierson, Fla.) is the fern capital of the world. I worked in a packing shed boxing up ferns to be shipped. Was right

by my house, and I got to walk to and from work every day before heading off to the yard to play ball.

➤ **Talent I'd most like to have:** Dunk at will. Playing a guitar and singing in front of 75,000 people wouldn't be bad either, right?

➤ **My dream date:** A little country girl from Lake Wales (Fla.). I married her 10 years ago.

➤ **Favorite city to visit:** I love going back home to Florida, and I certainly love seeing Mom and Dad at my ranch in Carrizo Springs, Texas. But, during the year, I like Pittsburgh, Cincinnati and Chicago. Midwest, blue-collar towns are my favorite.

➤ **Favorite sports team as a kid:** Gators, Steelers, Dodgers and Lakers

➤ **My greatest love:** My wife, Sharon, my kids, my mom and dad, baseball and hunting.

➤ **Favorite physical attribute about myself:** Probably my hand-eye coordination and sight. Wouldn't be able to be where I am today without it.

➤ **And least:** Not many people know this, but I always worked on making my legs bigger and stronger (especially my calves). We all aren't Brian Jordan.

➤ **Favorite values in others:** Honesty, integrity and loyalty

➤ **My heroes:** My mom and dad, without question

➤ **My bucket list:** I'd like to hunt at every place imaginable for white-tailed deer. I want to see my boys grow up healthy and happy. If I'm able to do that, I'm going to be a happy man.

➤ **My motto:** Many times, it is not the action but the reaction. You are not always going to make the right decision or do the right thing, but the way you handle the aftermath will define you as a person.

WILL'S WORLD

An unbearable truth

We're so splintered that no team could ever shuffle into our collective consciousness



Will Leitch is the author of four books, including *Are We Winning? Fathers and Sons in the New Golden Age of Baseball*. He is the founding editor of *Deadspin* and a contributing editor at *New York* magazine. Get more of his opinions at leitch.tumblr.com.

When I was a kid, the only team in the world that mattered was the 1985 Bears. They weren't my favorite team—truth be told, we downstate Illinois kids cheered against Chicago teams—but I had a William “The Refrigerator” Perry G.I. Joe nonetheless. The '85 Bears were larger than life; they were larger than myth.

In January, it'll have been 25 years since the Bears won the Super Bowl in New Orleans over the Patriots—an amazingly long time—yet they're still the most popular team in NFL history. Everyone, even people who didn't like sports, knew the '85 Bears. That team captured the country's imagination in a way no other team, perhaps in any sport, has.

Their coach, Mike Ditka, became an icon who inspired *Saturday Night Live* sketches a decade later and beer ads even today. Coca-Cola, faced with the marketing disaster that was New Coke, retreated by hiring quarterback Jim McMahon and the Fridge as its corporate spokesmen. Most famously,

of course, was “The Super Bowl Shuffle,” their taunting, goofy and shockingly catchy rap that actually hit the pop charts. The song is what makes the '85 Bears eternal. (My favorite lyrics are Walter Payton's “Runnin’ the ball is like makin’ romance.”)

They won, too, of course; history would have forgotten them—or mocked them—if they hadn't. In retrospect, it's crazy that the Bears won only one title; it feels like they dominated the decade. But as much as I loved that team and can quote almost every word of “The Super Bowl Shuffle,” they're a fossil from a time when one team could so dominate the sports landscape and cross over to nonsports fans. We'll never see another 1985 Bears. And it makes me sad.

Today, everything fills a niche. Whereas we once had three television channels to choose from, now we have hundreds. We once got our news from the newspaper, an occasional magazine and a half-hour of national TV; now, there are millions of options a click away. Whatever small thing it is you care about, you can find all the information on it you might want.

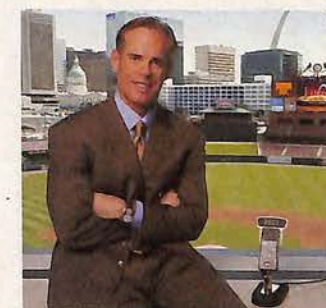
This is great for humanity's capacity for informed discourse, but we lose something in the exchange. We lose universally shared experiences, things that everyone knows about and discusses, no matter their different interests. Now, LeBron James fills a freaking niche. Those people who cross over into every realm of society—Tom Cruise, Michael Jordan, Michael Jackson (his death, along with the presidential election, are the last times I can remember a collective experience around the globe)—their influence has waned. There aren't as many worldwide stars. There aren't as many people—or teams—everybody knows.

Which is why the 1985 Bears were more special than we realize. No matter who wins the Super Bowl this season—I like the Falcons over the Jets, as if I know anything—will be just another name in a sports almanac (or, more accurately, Wikipedia), a big deal to those who obsess over football but swept away to history like every other team of the last 25 years. While we're talking football, someone else is checking his fantasy cricket team. I'm glad everyone's smarter and better informed. I'm just sad there isn't one thing that everybody knows and cares about, at one time, together. I don't miss the rap, though.

Bold, daring predictions

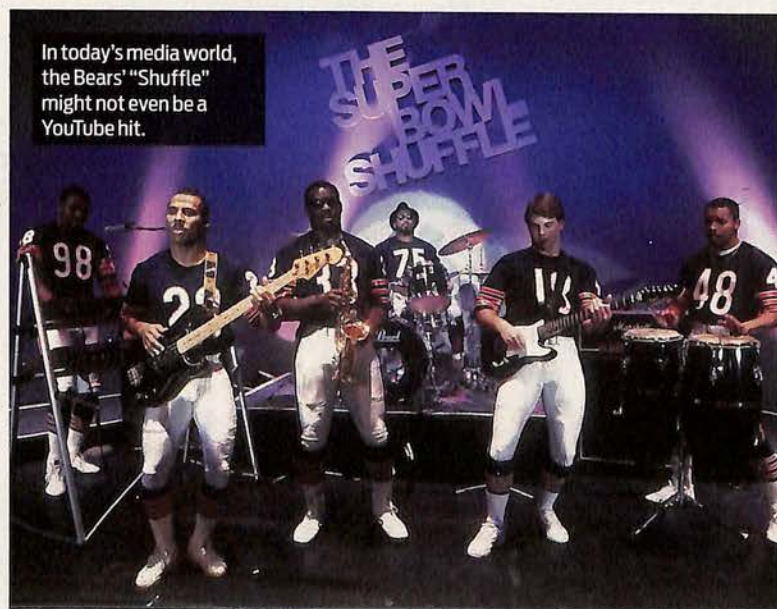
1 You will give a copy of my most recent book *Are We Winning?*, about the bonds of baseball and fatherhood, to someone you love for the holidays. Oh, wait, this isn't “Bold, daring begging”? I see.

2 I wrote this column while on jury duty. By the time you read it, I will still be in this windowless, depressing room. Waiting. By the time the paper it's printed on is recycled and/or turned into mulch, I will still be in this windowless, depressing room. By the time the sun bursts apart after millions of years of providing us life and sustenance, eradicating the solar system as we know it, I will be in this windowless, depressing room.



Joe Buck started in St. Louis before becoming a national play-by-play man.

3 I've been thinking about my previous column, about how we don't have as many recognizable announcers anymore. I'm curious: Who's the top up-and-coming young announcer in your market, the one we'll be watching and listening to in 25 years? You will e-mail me your picks at will@deadspin.com, and we'll run the most commonly mentioned.

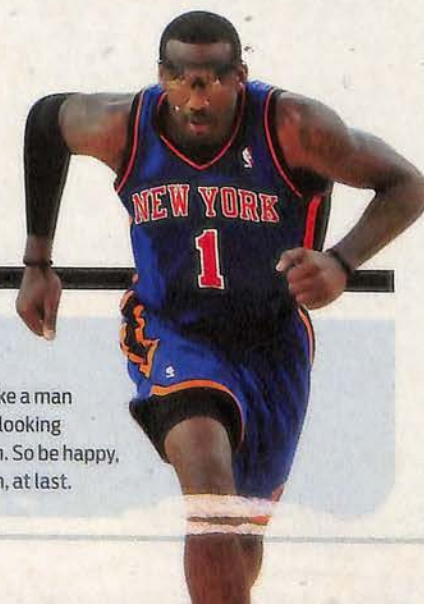


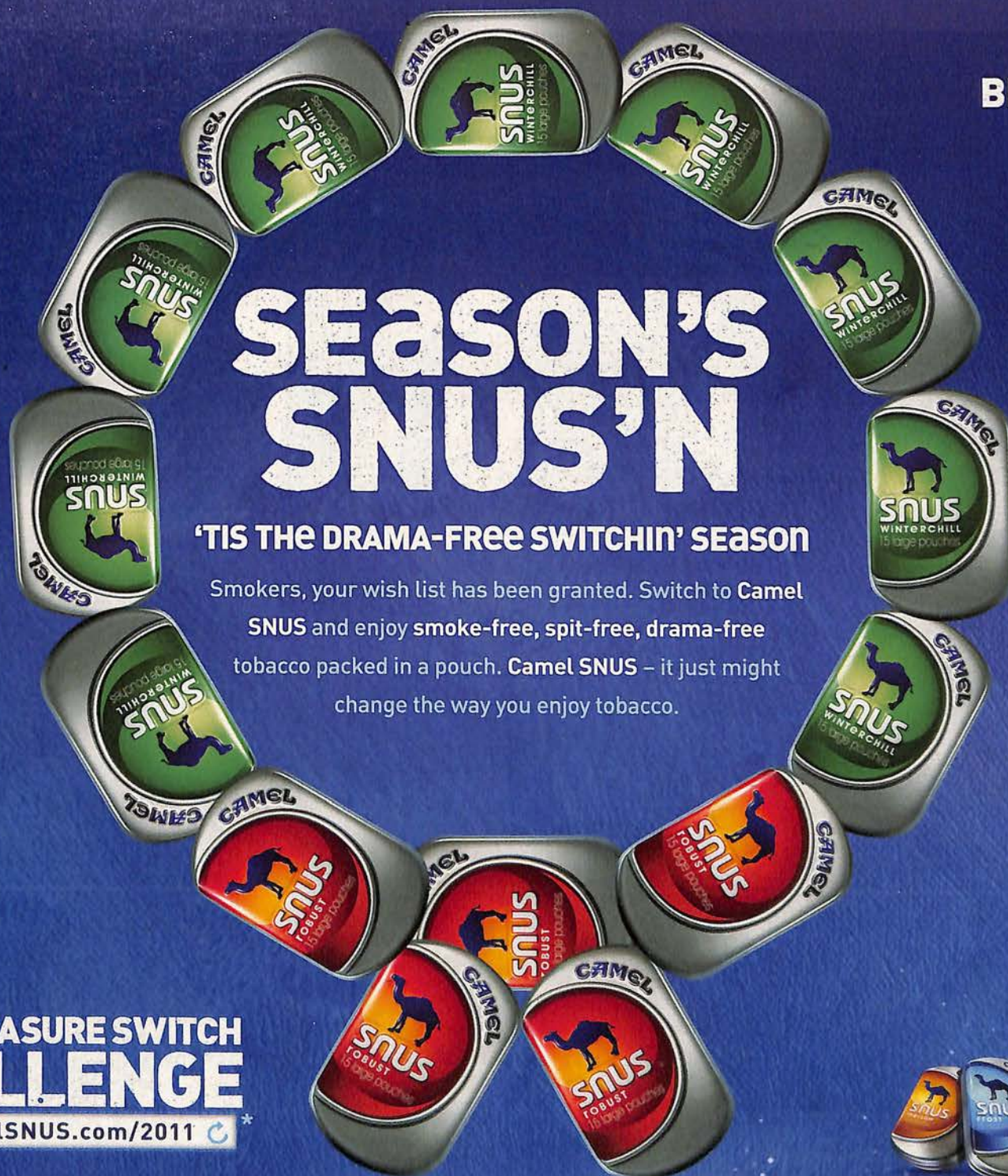
In today's media world, the Bears' “Shuffle” might not even be a YouTube hit.

People of the Fortnight

Mike Martz. Speaking of the Bears, isn't it something to see the “mad genius” relevant again? I thought he'd never make it back. But now he's all conservative, running a “balanced offense.” Oh, well, at least he's here and wacky, even if he's not as gloriously insane as he was.

Amare Stoudemire. The Knicks forward has played like a man obsessed, as if he never wants to hear the words “Steve Nash” again. It's looking increasingly likely that the Knicks could return to the playoffs this season. So be happy, Knicks fans. The country will get the opportunity to hate your team again, at last.





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5 QUESTIONS FOR SHANE VICTORINO



Before Shane Victorino became an All-Star, a World Series champ and a three-time Gold Glove winner, he was a two-time Rule 5 draftee. Those days of fighting for at-bats seem like a long time ago for the speedy center fielder, who has been a vital lineup cog in each of the Phillies' four consecutive N.L. East championship squads. After a weekend handing out gifts at a Philadelphia Boys & Girls Club, he took time out of his offseason to answer questions for *Sporting News* readers.

Q: What is it like to play for a team with a reputation for having some of the most unruly fans in all of baseball?

Steve Stricklin, Aberdeen, Md.

VICTORINO: Honestly, I don't look at it that way. They're unruly, meaning they're very passionate about the way they root as fans. That makes it great to play there. I've heard some opposing players say, "Gosh, I don't want to be an opposing team coming in to play in Philly because they make it harsh on opposing teams." Being the home team playing in Philly, I think it's great. They bring a lot of excitement, a lot of energy to the ballpark. I don't look at it as they're unruly fans; I think they're great fans.

Q: Dude, you got married in shorts! What was up with that?

Terry Lynch, Swarthmore, Pa.

VICTORINO: Well, first of all, I got married in a tuxedo and then at my reception, I was in shorts. I tried that, but I got married in a church, so it wouldn't have looked right to get married in shorts and an aloha shirt.

Q: What does it mean to you to play for the Philadelphia Phillies?

Zachary Weiss, via Facebook

VICTORINO: Basically, getting my first real opportunity here in Philly, it means a lot. I think being here for the last five years, and the passion that our fans show, to me that correlates to what I do on the field and the passion I have for the game. It's like a partnership. They're so passionate about their athletes and their sport that going out there every day means a lot to me, to actually play in a place like Philly and be loved in a place like Philly.

Q: What's the funniest jab you've ever heard from a fan?

Brent Wittenbrink, via Facebook

VICTORINO: That's a good one. Let's see ... "Go back to Hawaii, you pineapple." I heard that once—that was pretty good. I was just like, "Whoa." Pretty sure that was in Chicago.

Q: Have you seen the movie *Fight Club*? If so, I want to know if you could fight anyone in the entire history of man, alive or dead, who would it be?

Eric Krone, St. Charles, Mo.

VICTORINO: Yes, I've seen *Fight Club*. One person I'd like to fight? I don't know. I'm not a big violent, want-to-fight type of person. I'd have to say, if I had a chance to fight somebody, it would be pretty interesting to fight a UFC fighter just because they're so good at what they do, at the art of fighting. I mean, obviously, I wouldn't want to really do it. I wouldn't want to get in the Octagon with one of those guys. But being a fan of their sport and what they do, I think it'd be interesting to fight one of those guys and see how good they really are at what they do. To me, those guys are absolutely amazing. They're elite athletes.

—Ryan Fagan

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SPORTS BIZ

STREET & SMITH'S
**SportsBusiness
JOURNAL**

REPORT

➔ NFL commissioner **Roger Goodell** is No. 1 on *SportsBusiness Journal's* annual list of the 50 most influential people in sports business. ESPN/ABC president **George Bodenheimer** is No. 2, followed by NBA commissioner **David Stern**, MLB commissioner **Bud Selig** and NFL Players Association executive director **DeMaurice Smith**.



Roger Goodell

➔ Pac-10 commissioner **Larry Scott** says there is a "strong likelihood" the conference will launch its own cable channel in 2012, even as media executives and consultants have warned about the difficulties of getting such channels on air.

➔ Sources say outgoing New Orleans Hornets owner **George Shinn** is lending the NBA about \$70 million to help facilitate the league's purchase of his team. The league will repay him over two years at an interest rate of roughly 3 percent. The purchase price of the franchise is said to be in excess of \$300 million.

For the best sports business coverage anywhere, visit sportsbusinessjournal.com.

**G.M. Corner**

David Poile,
Nashville Predators

➔ I knew I wanted to be a G.M. when ... I was able to watch my dad (Bud Poile) serve as an NHL general manager (in Philadelphia from 1967-69 and Vancouver from 1970-73).

- ➔ For relaxation, I ... Golf.
- ➔ I can't live without ... My BlackBerry.
- ➔ I'm up and at 'em by ... 7 a.m.
- ➔ My monthly cell phone bill is ... The accounting department doesn't tell me, but I know they're not happy about it.
- ➔ My favorite player growing up was ... Phil Esposito.
- ➔ The G.M. I most admired in another sport was ... Red Auerbach.
- ➔ If I could be a G.M. in a different league, it'd be ... Baseball, because of the weather.
- ➔ My greatest moment as an athlete was ... Scoring four goals in a game at Northeastern.
- ➔ The one former player I'd deal for, no matter the price, is ... Bobby Orr.
- ➔ The last vacation I took was ... To Florida.
- ➔ My biggest role model in my sport is ... My father, Bud Poile.
- ➔ The best thing about my job is ... Every day is different, and (there's) the chasing of a goal.
- ➔ The worst job I ever had ... Stocking shelves at a Kinney shoe store as a high school student in California.

Upon further review ... Nationals prospect Bryce Harper is 18 years old. His age was incorrect in the December 6 issue.

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NEXT GEN

Jan Feb March April May June July Aug Sept Oct Nov **DECEMBER**

Scout and About

An NFL college scouting director takes SN on his team's road to the 2011 draft

This time of year, we're building a preliminary draft board, ranking the top players. Before our scouts leave and take a two-week breather, they will get their assignments for the various all-star games (North-South, East-West Shrine Game, Senior Bowl, etc.).

We don't staff every bowl game, but if there are games close to where our regional scouts live they often go to them. If I have specific questions about particular players, I will ask our guys to go to those players' bowl games. And if it's a really, really good matchup with a lot of draft prospects, I'll attend that game myself.

I'd like to go to the Rose Bowl, TCU vs. Wisconsin, because I want to see TCU quarterback Andy Dalton live. I also think the Alabama-Michigan State game (the Capital One Bowl) will be intriguing because of the matchup of Alabama's speed vs. Michigan State's power.

BCS bowl players with something to prove

ROSE BOWL: TCU VS. WISCONSIN

⊙ **TCU QB Andy Dalton.** He needs to show that he can be just as productive against a Big Ten team as he was in the Mountain West. This will be a great stage for him to show that he's one of the top-echelon quarterbacks in the draft.

⊙ **Wisconsin TE Lance Kendricks.** He's a good all-around player, but he wants to show that they play more than smash-mouth football in the Big Ten, that he can move around and stretch the field.

FIESTA BOWL: OKLAHOMA VS. CONNECTICUT

⊙ **Oklahoma RB DeMarco Murray.** He needs to prove he's a downhill runner, not a spread option runner.

⊙ **Connecticut OLB Lawrence Wilson.** He's a really good playmaker who must show he has enough speed to play against Big 12 offenses.

ORANGE BOWL: VIRGINIA TECH VS. STANFORD

⊙ **Stanford QB Andrew Luck.** This is an opportunity to cement the idea he'll be the best player in the draft even though he's a junior.

⊙ **Virginia Tech QB Tyrod Taylor.** He wants to prove he belongs on the same stage as Luck. Taylor is a Michael Vick type of athlete who can beat you with his feet and his arm.



Lawrence Wilson

SUGAR BOWL: OHIO STATE VS. ARKANSAS

⊙ **Ohio State DE Cameron Heyward.** He's an OK pass rusher who has to prove he can rush against Arkansas offensive tackle DeMarcus Love, whose strength is pass blocking.

⊙ **Arkansas OT DeMarcus Love.** Going up against Heyward, whose strength is his ability to hold the point of attack, Love needs to show he can get good movement in the running game.

BCS CHAMPIONSHIP GAME: OREGON VS. AUBURN

⊙ **Oregon MLB Casey Matthews.** He has the instincts, but can he stop quarterback Cam Newton? Can he match the speed of Auburn and make plays like he did this season in the Pac-10?

⊙ **Auburn DT Nick Fairley.** He's a junior who probably will declare for the draft. He dominated LSU and Alabama, but can he slow down this lightning-quick Oregon offense?

— As told to Dennis Dillon

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2010 SN COLLEGE FOOTBALL AWARDS

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

CAM

NEWTON

QB, AUBURN

Just in case the season hasn't been wild enough for Auburn quarterback Cam Newton, there is this: He might just be college football's next Best Ever.

Or something pretty darn close. At this point, the only player in recent memory Newton can be judged against is the one who transcended the game over the previous four seasons.

"It's just the ultimate honor to be talked about in the same sentence as Tim Tebow," Newton says. "To be compared to him ... wow."

So let's compare. In 2007, Tebow's Heisman Trophy-winning season at Florida, he became the first player in NCAA Division I-A history to eclipse 20 touchdowns passing (32) and rushing (23), and he had a quarterback rating of 172.5.

In Newton's Heisman-winning season this fall, he became the third player (after Nevada's Colin Kaepernick) in NCAA Division I-A history to join the 20/20 club, throwing for 28 TDs and rushing for 20. He also recorded a 188.2 QB rating. With one game remaining, Newton has accounted for 3,998 yards (2,589 passing, 1,409 rushing). Through the same number of games, Tebow had 4,181 (3,286 passing, 895 rushing).

At the very least, statistically, Newton has equaled Tebow's best season at Florida. Win a national championship and Newton's year would surpass Tebow's 2007 campaign.

—Matt Hayes

Scouts' Views: Sizing up Cam Newton

HIS SIZE

➔ **One NFL scout says:** "It's ridiculous. Who do you compare him to? He's 6-6, 250 pounds. Maybe Ben Roethlisberger, but Ben doesn't have what this kid has. I don't think we've seen a player like this, with this combination of size and speed and ability, maybe ever."

➔ **Another says:** "He's huge, but he doesn't always rely on it the way Tim Tebow did. It's not the biggest part of his game."

HIS SPEED

➔ **One NFL scout says:** "We'll only really know when he times. But ... he runs away from people. He's got that long stride, and his ability to stick and move gives him more separation."

➔ **Another says:** "The word that comes to mind is *dynamic*. But it's definitely something that helps him more in college than in the pros, unless he switches positions."

HIS STRENGTH

➔ **One NFL scout says:** "He's Tebow-like, no question. He's that strong. The difference between the two is (Newton) has the ability to make you miss. Tim just ran over you. When you've got a combination of brute strength and a guy that can shake you with shoulder and hip moves, it's scary. Choose your poison at that point."

➔ **Another says:** "The first thing I think of is his arm. But physically, he doesn't take a back seat to any quarterback. I want to see his (predraft) workout numbers, but he should be fine."

HIS ARM

➔ **One NFL scout says:** "I had a lot of questions about his arm earlier in the year. Didn't

know if it was strong enough, didn't really like his mechanics. But it seems like he has improved with each game. He still needs work; there's no question. But he's very accurate, and there's very little more important than that."

➔ **Another says:** "This is the big question mark. He can throw it, but you have to wonder about his accuracy and his touch. It takes more than arm strength. Look at JaMarcus Russell."

HIS W-L RECORD

➔ **One NFL scout says:** "I'm just shocked at how well he has performed with all of this stuff flying around him. He seems to get better every time he steps on the field. Nothing fazes him. You're looking at a guy who has (started) one season at a junior college and one in Division I. The more he plays, the more he improves, the more he learns about the game."

➔ **Another says:** "Auburn hasn't lost any of the games he's started, and guys on his team play better because of him. (But) it's always tough to tell how that will translate."

—Dave Curtis, Matt Hayes

SIGNIFICANT STAT

➔ Newton has lost one fumble in 488 touches (246 passes, 242 rushes) this season. The fumble—in the SEC championship game—and six interceptions give Newton a turnover average of only 0.54 a game.

—Matt Hayes



Cam Newton

WHAT THEY'RE SAYING ABOUT CAM NEWTON

HIS HEAD COACH



➔ **Gene Chizik:** "I've never seen anything like it. It's running the ball, throwing the ball. Usually great quarterbacks do one or the other better. What God has blessed Cameron with is the ability to be really, really good at both. I can say he's probably the best football player I've ever seen."

AN OPPONENT



➔ **South Carolina's Antonio Allen:** "We couldn't tackle him. I had two sacks on him that I missed the tackle. He's so strong in his legs and up top, too. I thought if you hit him high, you would go right through him. All you can do is just grab him and hang on and hope half the team comes over and helps you get him down."

A TEAMMATE



➔ **Auburn OT Lee Ziemba:** "He's an intelligent guy. Everybody thinks of how well he runs and how elusive he is. But he knows the offense so well. In the huddle, nobody doubts that he's in control."

OPPOSING COACHES



➔ **Clemson's Dabo Swinney:** "He is a big old joker. He looks like Daunte Culpepper. When you have a guy like that, it is like you're playing against 12 out there on offense."



➔ **Georgia's Mark Richt:** "Cam is a dual threat and a tough kid. They have other good players, but he's the difference."

AN AUBURN ALUM



➔ **Green Bay Packers linebackers coach and former Auburn LB Kevin Greene:** "Can you play 13 guys on defense?"

—Dave Curtis

COACH OF THE YEAR

CHIP
KELLY

OREGON

I knew Chip Kelly way back when ...



By Ricky Santos, Montreal Alouettes and former New Hampshire quarterback

To be honest, I'm not really that surprised he's doing so well. Look at the success he had at New Hampshire, and we didn't have big-time athletes in Division I-AA. So we knew when he went out to Oregon, if they gave him free rein, he would flourish. And they've run wild with his offense.

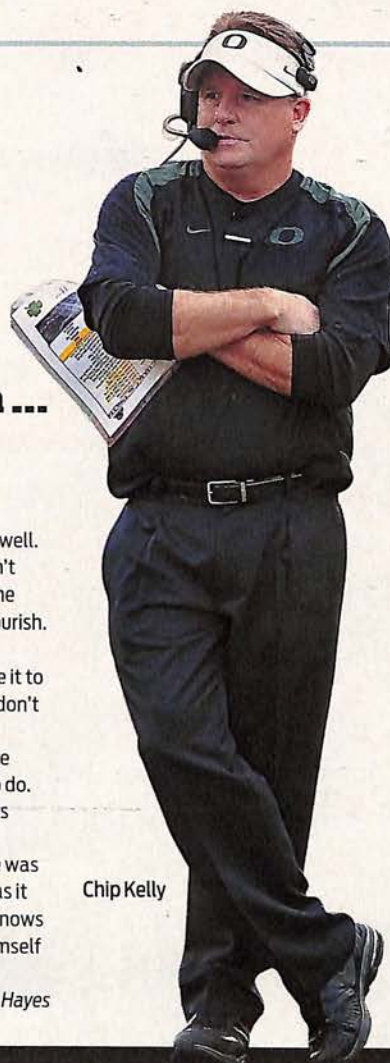
Everyone who plays at that level comes in with a big ego. But until you prove it to him, until he sees it face to face, he's going to be extremely hard on you. It's, "I don't care who you were or where you come from. What are you going to be next?"

What happened with the off-field stuff really showed who he is. It's a tribute to him how he handled it, that he didn't let it overwhelm what he was trying to do. He doesn't put one player over what he believes in. You don't see many coaches suspending their two best players and kicking one off the team.

When he left New Hampshire, we were probably the only guys who knew he was going to be the next big thing. I didn't know it was going to take off as quickly as it did and to this level. But he's the type of guy that once you buy into it, and he knows you're playing for him, he's going to work as hard as you. He truly believes in himself and his system and the preparation.

— As told to Matt Hayes

Chip Kelly



RECORD AT OREGON

➔ 22-3

CAREER RECORD

➔ 22-3

WHERE HE HAS BEEN

➔ Head coach, Oregon

2009-present

➔ Offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach, Oregon 2007-08

➔ Offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach, New Hampshire 1999-2006

➔ Offensive line coach, New Hampshire 1997-98

➔ Running backs coach, New Hampshire 1992, 1994-96

➔ Defensive coordinator, Johns Hopkins 1993

➔ Outside linebackers and strong safeties coach, Columbia 1991

➔ Freshman secondary and special teams coach, Columbia 1990

ACHIEVEMENTS

➔ First coach in Pac-10 history to win an outright conference title in his first season.

➔ Led Oregon to its first BCS national championship game.

➔ Led the Ducks to their first back-to-back outright Pac-10 titles in school history.

HE'S THE BEST BECAUSE ...

➔ Oregon WR Jeff Maehl says:

"His preparation is phenomenal. There is nothing that we see in a game that surprises us. We know exactly what a defense is going to do, and if it's something new they just added, he'll have an answer for it after the first couple of series."

➔ Oregon QB Darron Thomas

says: "It's his strong belief in his players. He knows if we're prepared, we're going to do what it takes to win. He trusts us to execute his plan."

➔ Oregon LB Casey Matthews

says: "Outside influences just don't bother him. He's not taking polls about how he should do this or that. He's doing it and not second-guessing."

SIGNIFICANT STAT

➔ This season, Oregon has 23 scoring drives of less than a minute—and 14 of the 23 were less than 25 seconds. In Kelly's tempo-based, no-huddle offense, it's all about speed. At times, the Ducks snap the ball less than 10 seconds after the previous play.

— Matt Hayes

FRESHMAN OF THE YEAR

MARCUS
LATTIMORE

RB, SOUTH CAROLINA

Outside of Cam Newton, Lattimore has been the best offensive player in the nation's best conference. Heading into his team's bowl game, he has 1,198 yards rushing and 19 total touchdowns—tied for seventh in the country. And when a Steve Spurrier running back puts up numbers like that, you know he's special.

➔ I chose South Carolina because ...

"Mostly because I believed in the coaches and everything they were telling me while I was being recruited. And I bonded with my recruiting class. It just felt comfortable here. Staying in-state, that was a big part of it, too. South Carolina had never really been a powerhouse like Bama or Florida, and I wanted to come in and start something new, help create that here."

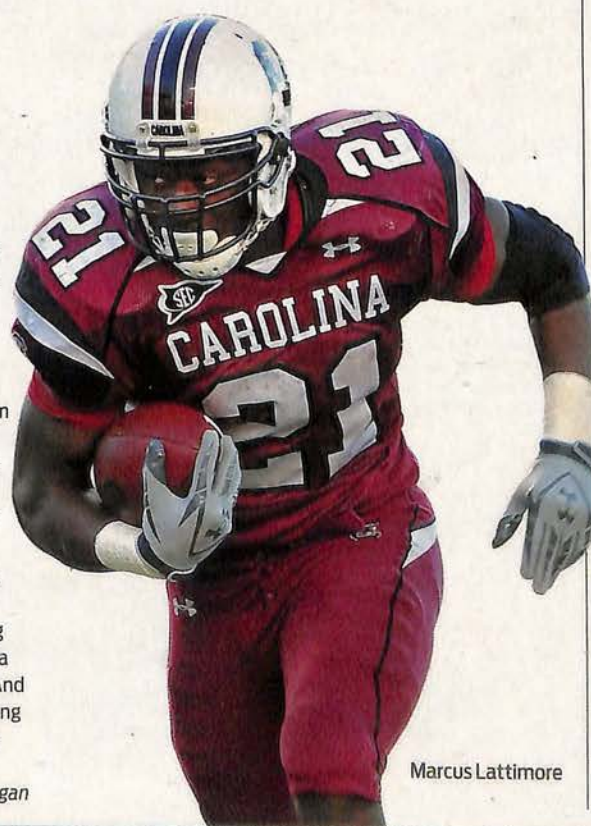
➔ I was successful this season because ... "I had goals coming into the

year, and so did the offensive line, and we achieved those goals together. I was able to pick up those tough yards by staying low and fighting for those extra yards, using pad leverage and my vision. After every game, I just got more comfortable and felt the game slowed down for me. I'm pass-protecting better."

➔ I'll be better next year because

... "I think I'm going to be three times better because I'm going to work really hard this offseason on the things that I know now about being a running back. I'll watch my tape and see what I could have done better every game. Watching film, that's going to get me better. I did a bit in high school but nothing like this. And I'm going to be stronger because I'm going to work hard in the weight room and be faster, too."

— Ryan Fagan



Marcus Lattimore

ALL-FRESHMAN TEAM

Offense

QB Aaron Murray, Georgia

RB Marcus Lattimore, South Carolina

RB James White, Wisconsin

WR Marquess Wilson, Washington State

WR Robert Woods, USC

TE Gavin Escobar, San Diego State

OL Luke Joeckel, Texas A&M

OL Seantrel Henderson, Miami

OL Jon Halapio, Florida

OL James Hurst, North Carolina

OL James Stone, Tennessee

K Ross Krautman, Syracuse

KR Andre Debose, Florida

Defense

DL Roosevelt Nix, Kent State

DL Justin Washington, Arizona

DL Damontre Moore, Texas A&M

DL Junior Onyeali, Arizona State

LB Ray Lewis, Oklahoma State

LB Kevin Pierre-Louis, Boston College

LB Jackson Jeffcoat, Texas

DB Brian Blechen, Utah

DB Xavier Rhodes, Florida State

DB Tony Jefferson, Oklahoma

DB Ricardo Allen, Purdue

P Kirby van der Kamp, Iowa State

PR Terrence Mitchell, South Florida

— Dave Curtis

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Gout's root cause is high uric acid.

If you have gout, high uric acid can lead to more attacks. To help reduce attacks, lower your uric acid.

ULORIC can help.

ULORIC is clinically proven to help lower uric acid to a healthy level (less than 6 mg/dL).

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ULORIC is a prescription medicine used to lower blood uric acid levels in adults with gout. ULORIC is not for the treatment of high uric acid without a history of gout.

Individual results may vary.

Important Safety Information

- Do not take ULORIC if you are taking Azathioprine, Mercaptopurine, or Theophylline.
- Your gout may flare up when you start taking ULORIC; do not stop taking your ULORIC even if you have a flare. Your healthcare provider may give you other medicines to help prevent your gout flares.
- A small number of heart attacks, strokes, and heart-related deaths were seen in clinical studies. It is not certain that ULORIC caused these events.
- Tell your healthcare professional about liver or kidney problems or a history of heart disease or stroke.
- Your healthcare professional may do blood tests to check your liver function while you are taking ULORIC.
- The most common side effects of ULORIC are liver problems, nausea, gout flares, joint pain, and rash.

Please see accompanying Important Patient Information for ULORIC on adjacent page and talk to your healthcare professional.

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.fda.gov/medwatch, or call 1-800-FDA-1088.



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Read the Patient Information that comes with ULORIC before you start taking it and each time you get a refill. There may be new information. This information does not take the place of talking with your healthcare provider about your medical condition or your treatment.

WHAT IS ULORIC?

ULORIC is a prescription medicine called a xanthine oxidase (XO) inhibitor, used to lower blood uric acid levels in adults with gout.

It is not known if ULORIC is safe and effective in children under 18 years of age.

WHO SHOULD NOT TAKE ULORIC?

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- take Azathioprine (Azasan®, Imuran®)
- take Mercaptopurine (Purinethol®)
- take Theophylline (Theo-24®, Elixophyllin®, Theochron®, Theolair®, Uniphyll®)

It is not known if ULORIC is safe and effective in children under 18 years of age.

WHAT SHOULD I TELL MY HEALTHCARE PROVIDER BEFORE TAKING ULORIC?

Before taking ULORIC tell your healthcare provider about all of your medical conditions, including if you:

- have liver or kidney problems
- have a history of heart disease or stroke
- are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. It is not known if ULORIC will harm your unborn baby. Talk with your healthcare provider if you are pregnant or plan to become pregnant.
- are breast-feeding or plan to breast-feed. It is not known if ULORIC passes into your breast milk. You and your healthcare provider should decide if you should take ULORIC while breast-feeding.

Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take, including prescription and non-prescription medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. ULORIC may affect the way other medicines work, and other medicines may affect how ULORIC works.

Know the medicines you take. Keep a list of them and show it to your healthcare provider and pharmacist when you get a new medicine.

HOW SHOULD I TAKE ULORIC?

- Take ULORIC exactly as your healthcare provider tells you to take it.
- ULORIC can be taken with or without food.
- ULORIC can be taken with antacids.
- Your gout may flare up when you start taking ULORIC, do not stop taking your ULORIC even if you have a flare. Your healthcare provider may give you other medicines to help prevent your gout flares.
- Your healthcare provider may do certain tests while you take ULORIC.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF ULORIC?

Heart problems. A small number of heart attacks, strokes and heart-related deaths were seen in clinical studies. It is not certain that ULORIC caused these events.

The most common side effects of ULORIC include:

- liver problems
- nausea
- gout flares
- joint pain
- rash

Tell your healthcare provider if you have any side effect that bothers you or that does not go away. These are not all of the possible side effects of ULORIC. For more information, ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist.

Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects. You may report side effects to the FDA at 1-800-FDA-1088.

HOW SHOULD I STORE ULORIC?

Store ULORIC between 59°F - 86°F (15°C - 30°C).

Keep ULORIC out of the light.

Keep ULORIC and all medicines out of the reach of children.

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE SAFE AND EFFECTIVE USE OF ULORIC.

Medicines are sometimes prescribed for purposes other than those listed in a patient information leaflet. Do not use ULORIC for a condition for which it was not prescribed. Do not give ULORIC to other people, even if they have the same symptoms that you have. It may harm them.

This patient information leaflet summarizes the most important information about ULORIC. If you would like more information about ULORIC talk with your healthcare provider. You can ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist for information about ULORIC that is written for health professionals. For more information go to www.uloric.com, or call 1-877-825-3327.

WHAT ARE THE INGREDIENTS IN ULORIC?

Active Ingredient: febuxostat

Inactive ingredients include: lactose monohydrate, microcrystalline cellulose, hydroxypropyl cellulose, sodium croscarmellose, silicon dioxide, magnesium stearate, and Opadry II, green



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SN ALL-AMERICAN TEAM

OFFENSE

➔ **QB Cam Newton, Jr., Auburn.** The third Division I-A player (after Tim Tebow and Colin Kaepernick) to rush for 20 touchdowns and throw for 20 touchdowns in a season.

➔ **RB LaMichael James, Soph., Oregon.** A fast and deceptively tough scatback who churned out another 1,000-yard season; he has rushed for 3,228 yards and 35 touchdowns in two years.

➔ **RB Jordan Todman, Jr., Connecticut.** Carried the team by rushing for 1,574 yards and 14 TDs even though opponents knew UConn wouldn't (couldn't) throw.

➔ **WR Justin Blackmon, Soph., Oklahoma State.** Is physical and has uncanny balance and vision

when competing for the ball in the air—qualities that make him a matchup nightmare for cornerbacks.

➔ **WR Ryan Broyles, Jr., Oklahoma.** Led the nation with 118 catches, but his dynamic ability after the catch separates him from other possession receivers.

➔ **TE Lance Kendricks, Sr., Wisconsin.** It's not often you see a tight end averaging 16.1 yards a catch.

➔ **OL Jake Kirkpatrick, Sr., TCU.** Has been a critical factor in the emergence of TCU's spread option running game the past two seasons.

➔ **OL Rodney Hudson, Sr., Florida State.** A four-year starter who got lost in FSU's rebuilding mode but not in the eyes of pro scouts.

➔ **OL Chase Beeler, Sr., Stanford.** A prototypical offensive lineman under coach Jim Harbaugh: a mauler with an attitude.

➔ **OL Gabe Carimi, Sr., Wisconsin.** Replaced Wisconsin legend Joe Thomas and has started nearly every game of his four-year career at left tackle.

➔ **OL Nate Solder, Sr., Colorado.** Played every snap this season and allowed just two sacks.

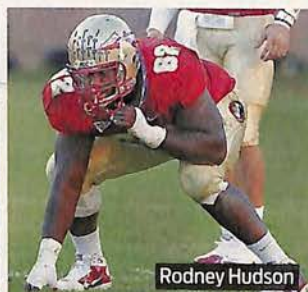
➔ **K Josh Jasper, Sr., LSU.** Tied for first in the nation with 26 field goals, including nine outside 40 yards and one from 53.

➔ **KR Eric Page, Soph., Toledo.** Led the nation in return TDs (three) and ranked third in kick return average (31.8)—plus caught 94 passes.

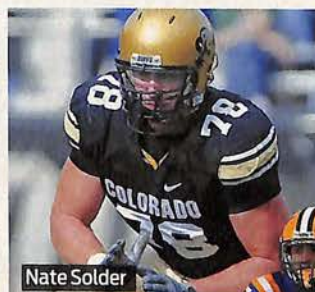


Justin Blackmon

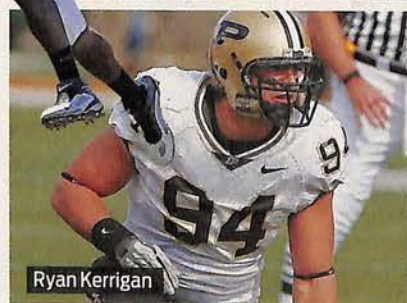
Lance Kendricks



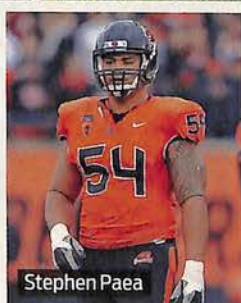
Rodney Hudson



Nate Solder



Ryan Kerrigan



Stephen Paea



Vontaze Burfict

Patrick Peterson

DEFENSE

➔ **DT Nick Fairley, Jr., Auburn.** The most dominant interior lineman in the game: 21 tackles for loss, 10½ sacks, 21 quarterback pressures.

➔ **DE Ryan Kerrigan, Sr., Purdue.** A dominating player on an average defense; led the nation in tackles for loss (26) and had 12½ sacks.

➔ **DE Da'Quan Bowers, Jr., Clemson.** Led the nation in sacks (15½) and finally lived up to his huge potential.

➔ **DT Stephen Paea, Sr., Oregon State.** Strong and active inside; overpowers opponents with brute upper-body strength and a low center of gravity.

➔ **LB Luke Kuechly, Soph., Boston College.** Has the strength to take on

and shed blocks and the speed to chase laterally; led nation in tackles (171).

➔ **LB Greg Jones, Sr., Michigan State.** The consummate run stuffer; significantly improved his pass coverage this season.

➔ **LB Vontaze Burfict, Soph., Arizona State.** Will be the game's most dominant player once he gets his emotions under control and cuts down personal fouls.

➔ **CB Patrick Peterson, Jr., LSU.** Shutdown cover corner who played his best in big games.

➔ **CB Prince Amukamara, Sr., Nebraska.** Physical in pass coverage and aggressive in run support; teams rarely threw his way.

➔ **S Rahim Moore, Jr., UCLA.** Interceptions were way down, but his improvement in run support was significant.

➔ **S Robert Sands, Jr., West Virginia.** Plays more like a linebacker but has good ball skills; was the leader of a defense that never gave up more than 21 points.

➔ **P Chas Henry, Sr., Florida.** Nation's leading punter (46.4 average) also filled in admirably as the Gators' kicker midway through season.

➔ **PR Cliff Harris, Soph., Oregon.** Electric returner (16.5 average, four TDs) is also one of the game's best cornerbacks.

— Matt Hayes

Conference bests

ACC

Offensive MVP: Tyrod Taylor, QB, Virginia Tech

Defensive MVP: Da'Quan Bowers, DE, Clemson

Coach of the year: Frank Beamer, Virginia Tech

Freshman of the year: Danny O'Brien, QB, Maryland



BIG EAST

Offensive MVP: Jordan Todman, RB, Connecticut

Defensive MVP: Chris Neild, DT, West Virginia

Coach of the year: Doug Marrone, Syracuse

Freshman of the year: Ross Krautman, K, Syracuse



Big Ten

Offensive MVP: Dan Persa, QB, Northwestern

Defensive MVP: Ryan Kerrigan, DE, Purdue

Coach of the year: Mark Dantonio, Michigan State

Freshman of the year: James White, RB, Wisconsin



BIG 12

Offensive MVP: Justin Blackmon, WR, Oklahoma State

Defensive MVP: Prince Amukamara, CB, Nebraska

Coach of the year: Mike Gundy, Oklahoma State

Freshman of the year: Taylor Martinez, QB, Nebraska



Conference USA

Offensive MVP: G.J. Kinne, QB, Tulsa

Defensive MVP: Vinny Curry, DE, Marshall

Coach of the year: George O'Leary, UCF

Freshman of the year: Jeff Godfrey, QB, UCF



MAC

Offensive MVP: Chandler Harnish, QB, Northern Illinois

Defensive MVP: Roosevelt Nix, DT, Kent State

Coach of the year: Michael Haywood, Miami (Ohio)

Freshman of the year: Roosevelt Nix, DT, Kent State



Mountain West

Offensive MVP: Andy Dalton, QB, TCU

Defensive MVP: Tejay Johnson, S, TCU

Coach of the year: Brady Hoke, San Diego State

Freshman of the year: Ronnie Hillman, RB, San Diego State



PAC-10

Offensive MVP: LaMichael James, RB, Oregon

Defensive MVP: Vontaze Burfict, LB, Arizona State

Coach of the year: Chip Kelly, Oregon

Freshman of the year: Robert Woods, WR, USC



SEC

Offensive MVP: Cam Newton, QB, Auburn

Defensive MVP: Nick Fairley, DT, Auburn

Coach of the year: Gene Chizik, Auburn

Freshman of the year: Marcus Lattimore, RB, South Carolina



Sun Belt

Offensive MVP: Bobby Rainey, RB, Western Kentucky

Defensive MVP: Jamari Lattimore, DE, Middle Tennessee

Coach of the year: Mario Cristobal, Florida International

Freshman of the year: Kolton Browning, QB, Louisiana-Monroe



WAC

Offensive MVP: Kellen Moore, QB, Boise State

Defensive MVP: Chris Carter, DE, Fresno State

Coach of the year: Chris Ault, Nevada

Freshman of the year: Keith Smith, LB, San Jose State



— Dave Curtis, Matt Hayes

2010 SN **ROY HALLADAY** SP, PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES PRO ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

'We did it together'

You might think pitching a perfect game, throwing the first playoff no-hitter in 54 years and winning a Cy Young award would leave a guy talking about individual accomplishments. But when our pro athlete of the year lists his five favorite moments in a season he dominated, he emphasizes the people he shared them with.

By Roy Halladay

Photo by Preston Mack for SN

After the perfect game I threw in my 11th start with the Phillies, I bought Baume & Mercier watches for all the players and staff. Each guy's watch was silver, with black around the outside of the dial, and on the back the line score of the game was engraved, along with his name. I'd thought awhile about what words to put on the boxes before settling on: "We did it together."

Looking back on the entire 2010 season, I feel it can be summed up in those four words. I might someday forget the details of the perfect game, the playoff no-hitter and any other individual moment but never the camaraderie that we had. I include the fans of Philadelphia in that, too. The people who surrounded me throughout the season were integral parts of my five favorite moments from the best year of my baseball life.



WELCOME TO PHILLY DECEMBER 15-16, 2009, PHILADELPHIA

For me, the year 2010 began a couple of weeks early. That's when my long-anticipated trade to the Phillies finally happened.

After my wife, Brandy, and I arrived in Philadelphia a few days before the deal was made official, we got a backdoor view of the city. They snuck us through the airport, in and out of the hotel, to the hospital for my physicals—it was always back doors. We didn't realize until later that there truly were camera crews camped

outside all those places. That was the part I'd never thought about, just how big this team is in this city.

After we got my contract extension worked out and had my introductory press conference the following day, the 76ers put us in a luxury box for a game against LeBron James and the Cavaliers. When they showed us on the JumboTron, the entire crowd stood up and cheered. It gave both of us goose bumps. I'd expected some polite clapping, but that reaction took my breath away.

2010 numbers

Record	21-10
ERA	2.44
Complete games	9
Shutouts	4
Strikeouts	219
Walks per 9 IP	1.1

PERFECTION

MAY 29, 2010, MIAMI

The biggest challenge for me came before my start vs. the Marlins. My previous outing had been rough—the Red Sox knocked me around—and the ensuing days were a real grind. I spent a lot of time standing in the outfield before games with Jamie Moyer discussing my mechanics; my tempo was off, and I felt slow to the plate. Jamie said he thought I was stepping sideways in my windup rather than building a lot of backward-to-forward momentum. I owe that crucial mechanical adjustment to him.

Warming up in Miami, I could tell I had good stuff, but in the first inning my location wasn't sharp—I had 3-ball counts on leadoff man Chris Coghlan and No. 3 hitter Hanley Ramirez. I had to get guys out with strikes rather than expand the zone and make them chase, which is how I typically like to pitch.

In the third inning, I was aware that I hadn't allowed a baserunner. Earlier than you'd think, right? But it wasn't until the seventh that I started to think something special could happen, and it wasn't until two outs in the ninth that I didn't feel there was still a long way to go.

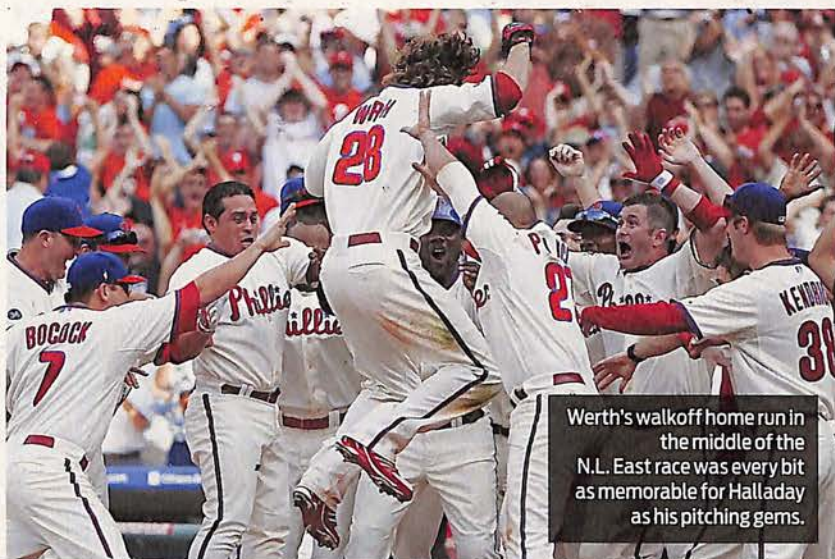
I felt pretty collected through the whole game; even after the last out happened, there was an odd feeling of being a spectator as my teammates began to celebrate. But I let the intensity go once I saw Carlos Ruiz's and Ryan Howard's faces—they were so excited, how could I not enjoy the moment?

In the clubhouse, I called my son Braden, who was 9 at the time. He's the biggest Phillies fan in the world, and I knew he'd be up late (unlike his little brother, Ryan, who'd fallen asleep). He said, "You're the 20th pitcher ever to throw a perfect game!" That really made me laugh because he obviously was paying attention to what they said on TV.



Teammates showed Halladay that, yes, you can celebrate after a perfect game.

HALLADAY, RUIZ AND HOWARD: WILFREDO LEE / AP



Werth's walkoff home run in the middle of the N.L. East race was every bit as memorable for Halladay as his pitching gems.

FIRE IN THE CLUBHOUSE

SEPTEMBER 19, 2010, PHILADELPHIA

What a month September was for the Phillies and for me. We started it three games behind the Braves and ended it five games in front, the N.L. East title already clinched. We were 21-6, and I was fortunate to win my five starts, thanks in large part to our offense. But the memory that stands out the most is of a day when I didn't pitch—the caper of a series sweep over the Nationals that I had absolutely nothing to do with.

Our three-game lead in the division was in jeopardy as we entered the ninth inning trailing, 6-3. We'd already won the first two games of the series, and Atlanta was coming in the next day; we easily could've gotten off the field with a loss and started preparing ourselves for an immensely important series vs. the Braves. But Ryan Howard drove in a pair with a single to

make it 6-5, and one batter later, with a man on, Jayson Werth stepped into the box.

It's not just that Jayson's home run to center field was a massive shot—believe me, it was—but the reaction of the guys was even bigger.

I've never seen a team so excited in the clubhouse; players and coaches were literally screaming. At one point I had to sit down and close my eyes because I was starting to get dizzy. It started to die down before Jayson was done giving his postgame interviews on the field, but then he entered the clubhouse and everything erupted again. He's an excitable guy, too—he pretty much lost it. It was awesome, incredible, and definitely something I'll never forget.



Halladay has 13 years of experience, but he was a playoff newbie in 2010.

THE CLINCHER

SEPTEMBER 27, 2010, WASHINGTON

What stands out to me about my final start of the regular season was not the game I pitched or that the win at Nationals Park clinched the division title for the Phillies. Those were big deals, of course, but I took even more meaning from the experience I shared with teammates in the moments after the game.

We had a subdued celebration on the field, then I had a few interviews to do before I could head into the clubhouse. I expected everybody to be spraying champagne and going nuts when I got there; instead, they were waiting for my arrival so that Mike Sweeney, Brian Schneider and I could be the first to pop the corks. Why us? Because we were the only guys on the team who'd never been to the playoffs.

The guys could've had the Philly stalwarts like Chase Utley, Ryan Howard and Jimmy Rollins lead the celebration. But no—it was the three of us veteran newcomers as equals, because Mike and Brian were as important to our success as anybody. The gesture meant a lot to all three of us, and we talked about it for weeks afterward.

—As told to Steve Greenberg

MILESTONE 2: THE PLAYOFF NO-HITTER

Fifty-four years passed between the first no-hitter in postseason history—Don Larsen's perfect game for the Yankees in the 1956 World Series—and the second, Roy Halladay's no-hitter vs. the Reds in the 2010 NLDS (in which Halladay allowed one walk and faced 28 hitters).

In an SN story days after Larsen's outing, Brooklyn batters called his delivery "sneaky fast", and umpire Babe Pinelli said he "(hit) the corners with uncanny skill." Home plate ump **John Hirschbeck** described Halladay's performance for SN:

"Around the fourth inning, I remember thinking, *Wow, this guy's got really good stuff tonight.* He was throwing first-pitch strikes, and they weren't coming in iffy—he wasn't nibbling at the plate. He had such command, all strikes but with different speeds, different pitches.

"After the last out of the fifth, I looked up and saw there were no hits. From there I kept reminding myself: *This probably won't happen, but don't screw up. Call your normal strike zone. Don't let this be about you.* I wanted to make sure the Reds had their chance, but in the end they had no chance."

—Steve Greenberg

MILESTONE 1: THE PERFECT GAME

On May 29 against the Marlins, Roy Halladay pitched the 20th perfect game in major league history. Though very few slouches have reached perfection, Halladay was only the second pitcher, after Sandy Koufax, to perform the feat as part of a Cy Young season (though, to be fair to Cy Young, he couldn't win an award that didn't exist until 1956). SN ranked the career achievements of the 20 perfect pitchers.



Just how hard is it to achieve perfection? Even Cy Young, in his 511 career wins, was able to do it just once.

Rank	Player, team	Year of perfect game	Season record	Season ERA	Career record	Career ERA	Cy Young awards
1	Cy Young , Americans	1904	26-16	1.97	511-316	2.63	0
2	Randy Johnson , Diamondbacks	2004	16-14	2.60	303-166	3.29	5
3	Sandy Koufax , Dodgers	1965	26-8	2.04	165-87	2.75	3
4	Roy Halladay , Phillies	2010	21-10	2.44	169-86	3.32	2
5	Addie Joss , Indians	1908	24-11	1.16	160-97	1.89	0
6	Catfish Hunter , A's	1968	13-13	3.35	224-166	3.26	1
7	Monte Ward , Grays	1880	39-24	1.74	164-103	2.10	0
8	Jim Bunning , Phillies	1964	19-8	2.63	224-184	3.27	0
9	Dennis Martinez , Expos	1991	14-11	2.39	245-193	3.70	0
10	David Cone , Yankees	1999	12-9	3.44	194-126	3.46	1
11	David Wells , Yankees	1998	18-4	3.49	239-157	4.13	0
12	Mark Buehrle , White Sox	2009	13-10	3.84	148-110	3.85	0
13	Kenny Rogers , Rangers	1994	11-8	4.46	219-156	4.27	0
14	Tom Browning , Reds	1988	18-5	3.41	123-90	3.94	0
15	Mike Witt , Angels	1984	15-11	3.47	117-116	3.83	0
16	Len Barker , Indians	1981	8-7	3.91	74-76	4.34	0
17	*Don Larsen , Yankees	1956	11-5	3.26	81-91	3.78	0
18	Lee Richmond , Ruby Legs	1880	32-32	2.15	75-100	3.06	0
19	Dallas Braden , A's	2010	11-14	3.50	25-35	4.20	0
20	Charlie Robertson , White Sox	1922	14-15	3.64	49-80	4.44	0

*Perfect game came in Game 5 of the World Series

A NO-HIT START TO THE PLAYOFFS

OCTOBER 6, 2010, PHILADELPHIA

I didn't throw for six or seven days between my last start of the regular season and the postseason opener, which drove me kind of crazy. I knew there was going to be a lot of talk about how I would do in the postseason, and I had to do my best to not let that be a distraction. I went into total isolation mode. I started reminding myself of all my mental and mechanical keys. I didn't remember anything my wife said for two days leading up to the game.

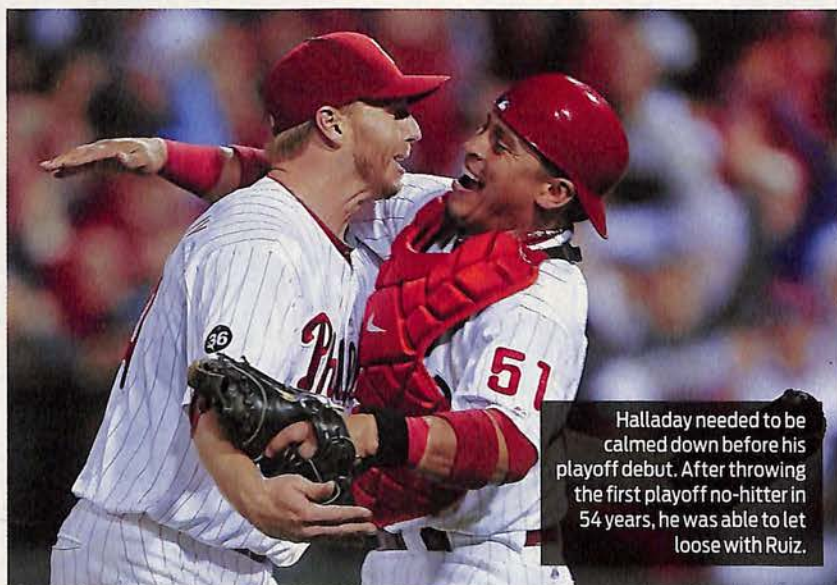
But I sure remember that walk to the Reds' Jay Bruce with two outs in the fifth inning. That said, it's not like I was thinking about a no-hitter, let alone a perfect game, at that point. In the seventh inning, Joey Votto stepped out of the batter's box before back-to-back pitches—that's when I realized that not only was I feeling good but the Reds were feeling they needed to try to change

something to knock me off that post, so to speak.

For a pitcher, that's a great feeling. The no-hitter became more possible because I was so intent on getting each guy out to get that much closer to a 1-0 series lead.

Big thanks to pitching coach Rich Dubee for helping me relax before the game—it was a huge help. And I couldn't have done it without my catcher, Carlos Ruiz, whom I respect so much. Carlos is such a good player and just the greatest guy. He was going wild after the final out; he yelled so loud into my right ear that I couldn't hear out of it for hours afterward. But you know what? He felt like an equal partner in our accomplishment, and I love that about him. That camaraderie was one of the best things about a year unlike any other in my career.

—As told to Steve Greenberg



Halladay needed to be calmed down before his playoff debut. After throwing the first playoff no-hitter in 54 years, he was able to let loose with Ruiz.

MILESTONE 3: THE CY YOUNG AWARD



Roy Halladay claimed his first Cy Young award in 2003, at age 26. Among baseball's 16 multiple-Cy winners, only former Braves and Mets lefthander **Tom Glavine** (1991 and '98) can match Halladay's seven-year gap between awards. Glavine, who won them at ages 25 and 32, gave SN three things a pitcher must do differently in his 30s than he did in his mid-20s if he wants to stay on top.

1. Age gracefully. Unless you want to walk around in constant pain later in your career, you have to change your fitness mindset. Be careful not to pound the weights—or your knees—excessively. It's better to focus on flexibility and maintenance rather than pure strength and to seek cardio options other than just running.

2. Bait the opposition. Media—and scouts—always want to be the first to report that an older player has changed in some way. For me, the perception came about in my 30s that I was starting to pitch inside a lot. It was a fish story. Was I pitching inside more? A little bit, sure, but I was still living on the outside corner. You can play to those scouting reports with one or two well-timed pitches and change the book on yourself somewhat.

3. Change with the times. Early in my career, I didn't spend much time studying hitters; I focused on what I did well and figured that was good enough. As better technology came available, I was resistant. Eventually, though, I learned how to load up a couple hours of video on each guy I'd be facing and really dive into studying. With these advances, coaching has improved, too. Keep your eyes and ears open.

—As told to Steve Greenberg

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HIGHLIGHT ZONE

SPORTING NEWS PROMOTIONS AND PRODUCT NEWS

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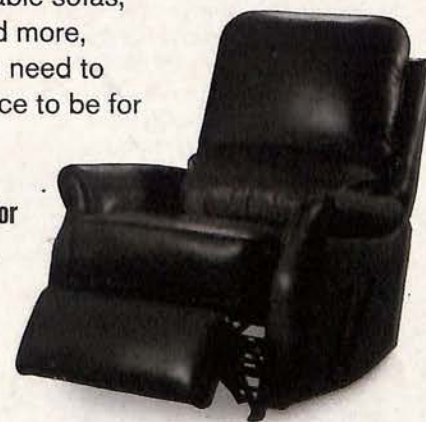
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2010 SN COLLEGE ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

KYLE SINGLER SENIOR F, DUKE

'There's so much more to do'

Even after winning the national championship and the Final Four most outstanding player award, Singler came back to college with the hopes he and his Blue Devils can repeat

Photo by Les Todd / Duke Photography for SN

Kyle Singler's father was a quarterback at Oregon State; his mother played basketball there. Four of Singler's uncles played major-college football or basketball, and his little brother, E.J., is a sophomore starting forward at Oregon. With apologies to all of them, though, the matter of who is the family's finest athlete is officially closed. "There's always a debate, which makes our family fun to be around," says Duke's All-American 6-8 senior forward, "but I guess when it's all said and done, what you've done and achieved speaks for itself. That's kind of the way I see it."

The way we see it, no college athlete made a bigger mark on 2010 than Singler, who was MVP of the ACC Tournament, most outstanding player at the Final Four and the No. 1 reason Duke made it back to the top of the mountain—and appears ready to stay there awhile. Fresh off a career high-tying 30-point game—in a win over E.J.'s Ducks—the Medford, Ore., native spoke with *Sporting News*' Steve Greenberg.

SN: Four weeks after winning the national championship, you turned 22—making you the oldest Final Four most outstanding player since Maryland's Juan Dixon in 2002. A little more age and experience can go a long way in college basketball, can't it?

SINGLER: Definitely. I think it starts with coach (Mike) Krzyzewski, how he brings the freshmen along. Since my freshman year, I've grown so much as a player and even as a person; I feel I act older than I am just from being around him. Coach always holds you to a high standard, no matter who you are. That has helped a lot of players mature and become true student-athletes and then, when they graduate, become successful people, good parents, stuff like that.

SN: You chose to move across the country to attend Duke. How has that worked out compared with what you anticipated?

SINGLER: Everything I expected on the court has happened. The things that have happened off the court and changed my life, like being far away from home, have been different than I expected. I've had to grow up kind of by myself, without my family. That was one of the reasons I came—to find myself—but it has been hard being away from my family. ... I found out that I relied on my parents a lot, even for little things; I found myself having stacks of laundry that needed to get done that I had to do myself. I needed to become more independent and also to get out of my comfort zone. I'm not really that much of an interactive person, so getting to know different people, and on the East Coast so many different cultures, has been interesting and fun.

SN: You were an undersized power forward as a freshman at Duke; although you did well on the whole, you also got knocked around some. How had that changed by last March, and how would you describe yourself on the court as a senior this season?

SINGLER: There are a couple of players on the team who really don't have positions, and I'm one of those players. I'm best when I'm just playing, whether on the wing or inside because I'm just as good at both. ... There really wasn't a point last season when I felt like I'd broken through. I'm a better player this year. I feel like I know the game better and I'm stronger.

2009-10 numbers

Points per game	17.7
Rebounds per game	7.0
Assists per game	2.4
Steals per game	1.0
Field goal percentage	.415



SN: With all you accomplished in March and April—including becoming part of the second Duke duo, with Jon Scheyer, to each score 700 points in a season (Jay Williams and Shane Battier did it in 2000-01)—were your college dreams pretty much realized?

SINGLER: Kinda-sorta. Stuff never turns out exactly as you imagined. Winning the national championship was amazing; I'd always dreamed about winning one of those. The things I've achieved individually have been great, too. But there's so much more to do. That's what keeps things exciting. I'm still dreaming. I'm a pretty motivated guy; I like to win and don't get satisfied that easily. That was one of the reasons why I came back to school: to keep on winning, win another national championship, become a better leader and also try to win (national) player of the year.

SN: Is college basketball better when Duke is the team to beat?

SINGLER: I'm not quite sure; I don't really get that outside perspective. But I remember when I was little and Duke was one of the best teams in country; I got that feeling Duke was like the Yankees or the Lakers, always one of those teams other people wanted to play and beat.

SN: At the Final Four, Scheyer called you the toughest player he'd ever played with. Where does toughness rank among your on-court weapons?

SINGLER: I don't know, but, yeah, I guess I am (tough). Since I was little, nothing really fazed me that much. I always played up in divisions—football, basketball, baseball—and maybe playing with older guys toughened me up a little bit. I could always mix it up. ... Now that it's my last year, I have to turn it up higher. Coach always talks about having a "final-season mentality." I think that's what I have and Nolan (Smith) has; we understand it's our last year and whatever we want to do, it's our last chance to do it.

SN: You played with USA Basketball in the offseason alongside a group of collegians who practiced against the men's national team. Which NBA star was directly involved in your best—or worst—moment?

SINGLER: I had the chance to guard Kevin Durant, one of the best players in the world. It was a great experience, a humbling experience. He's very talented—obviously—and you can just tell how much he loves the game; he works really hard. There was one time



Singler (second from right) wants to celebrate one more title.

in a scrimmage when we were beating them by maybe 10 points. He led the comeback, scored 15 straight points and had a buzzer-beater to tie the game. From there, well ...

SN: At least you had visual arts to fall back on; that's your major. How'd you do in 2010 as a student?

SINGLER: School is going great. I love my teachers, and I'm scheduled to graduate at the end of the school year. Visual arts just gets me. I have a passion for it. I love to paint. I love to do graphic design on the computer. Someday I'm sure I'll work in the visual arts, but for now it'll probably be just a hobby. I think I have more talent at basketball.

1 QUESTION, 3 ANSWERS: HOW GOOD CAN KYLE SINGLER BE AS A PRO?



Duke coach **MIKE KRZYZEWSKI** says: "I believe Kyle will be a solid NBA starter. He has the talent both offensively and defensively to do that. What separates Kyle from other players is his attitude and his willingness to work on every single play in practice and in games. Any NBA team would benefit having Kyle, as he's an easy guy to play with and a great teammate."



USA Basketball Select Team coach **LORENZO ROMAR** says: "I think he'll always find a way to play—not only play but have a positive impact on a pro team. He's just so versatile and plays so hard. He's very bright, and his attitude is just right. Whoever gets him is going to be very fortunate because he's a winner."



Oklahoma City Thunder F **KEVIN DURANT**, whom Singler guarded as a member of the USA Select Team last summer, says: "Kyle is going to be one of those great glue guys who can play several positions, score the ball and defend. I think he is going to have a long career at the next level."

— Steve Greenberg

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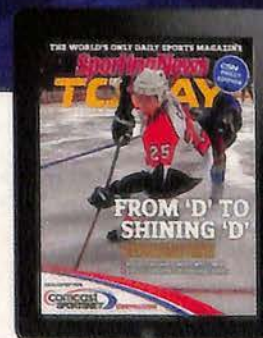
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2010 SN HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

MIKE BELLAMY SENIOR RB, CHARLOTTE (PUNTA GORDA, FLA.)

'I'm not going to let anyone win—boy, girl, old lady'

It's his speed that got him noticed by recruiters, but Bellamy says his drive was the key to his spectacular high school numbers

Photo by Matt Houston for SN

There's a track club in Orlando that draws young speedsters from across the state. Tennessee Titans Pro Bowl running back Chris Johnson learned to sprint there. Florida Gators burner Jeff Demps did, too. And so did Mike Bellamy—a Clemson-bound running back from Charlotte High in Punta Gorda, Fla., who wrapped his prep career with more than 7,000 rushing yards and more than 100 touchdowns.

Bellamy is often compared to Johnson and Demps—"We're all real good friends," he says—as well as to C.J. Spiller, another Floridian who starred at Clemson before becoming a first-round NFL pick. Talk about fast company.

Bellamy's coach, Binky Waldrop, says his best player can be "a handful at times" because of a boundless energy that affects his ability to, well, just be still. There are worse ways to describe a running back. Bellamy spoke with *Sporting News'* Steve Greenberg.

SN: You rushed for 40 touchdowns your senior season. Do you remember all of them? Can you replay them in your mind?

BELLAMY: No, not at all. I don't remember things. I'm not a good rememberer. After the games are over, I'm just like a regular kid.

SN: What's inside you that makes you special?

BELLAMY: I'm very competitive; I do not like to lose, whether it's video games or anything else. I take everything 100 percent. I'm not going to let anyone win—boy, girl, old lady. That's how

I am. I don't get satisfied. Sometimes I look at my stats or the game tape and think, *I know what I've got to get better at.*

SN: Such as?

BELLAMY: I was 160 pounds my sophomore year. Now I'm about 187, just from lifting and eating and stuff. I have to keep getting stronger. Clemson will probably put some more weight on me, but they say I have nice size. Coming in, I'm a little bigger than C.J. was.

SN: Was it easy for you on the field in high school?

BELLAMY: Some games were easy, some were tough. I just did some things I (wouldn't) normally think I could do. I'd look on film: *Dang, I did that?* It's not like I knew what I was going to do before plays.

SN: Was there ever a time when you felt there was someone else on the field who was as good a player as you, or perhaps an even better player?

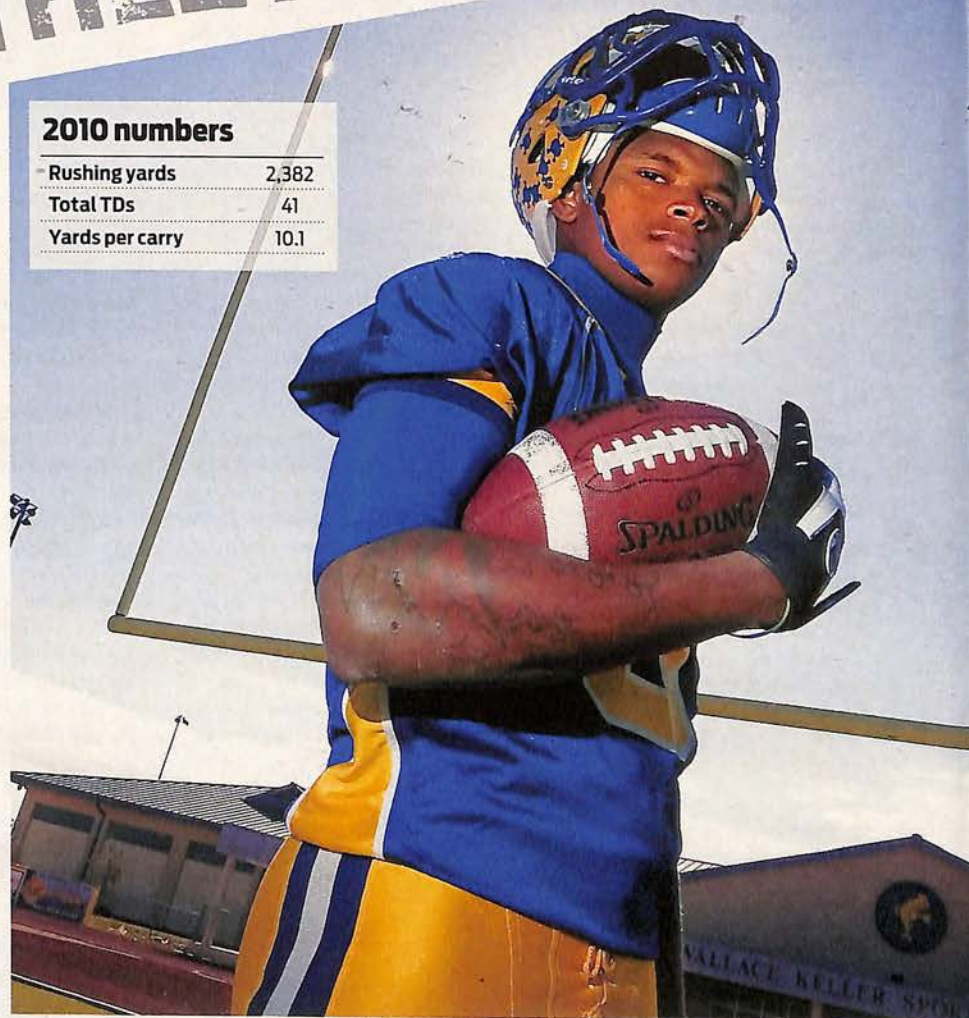
BELLAMY: What it's about is: Who wants it more? Who's going to work harder? Who's going to go 100 percent? A lot of good teams get beat, but who wants it the most?

SN: You aren't ranked No. 1 among all recruits, or even running backs, by most recruiting services. Does that matter to you?

BELLAMY: A lot of people say I'm overrated. I honestly think I'm underrated. They don't put me

2010 numbers

Rushing yards	2,382
Total TDs	41
Yards per carry	10.1



in front of, like, *ESPN Rise*, or on all the magazines, that stuff. ... I've been playing varsity since ninth grade—I know I should be ranked higher. I think I should be ranked No. 1 in the country.

SN: This question comes from your coach: What's the most important thing you'll remember from your high school career?

BELLAMY: That's a hard one. I'd probably say my attitude. Just how I am; I get mad real fast. I don't like losing; I don't like feeling people are better than me. I get mad and take everything dramatic. I've had to learn that I'm not always going to be the best because there's always going to be someone better.

SN: Do you have any concerns about your ability to handle what comes next?

BELLAMY: Nothing at all. I can handle it all. ... Everyone loves me. I'm very outgoing; I have the best personality—a smile that kills. A lot of girls say that. Girls love me.

SN: You know, that's a pretty funny answer. It's nice to be a kid, isn't it?

BELLAMY: It is. I'm very serious about football, though. I have big goals. I'm going to

win the Heisman; I plan on winning the Heisman at some point at Clemson. And I plan on rushing for over 1,000 yards each year.

SN: Are you going to be OK with it if you have to wait your turn at Clemson? Or share the load? And, by the way, you're not going to score 40 touchdowns in a season.

BELLAMY: Yeah, that's fine. But I already said what I was going to do. And I plan on winning a bowl game, if not a national championship.

SN: What do you see when you daydream about your first practices at Clemson next summer?

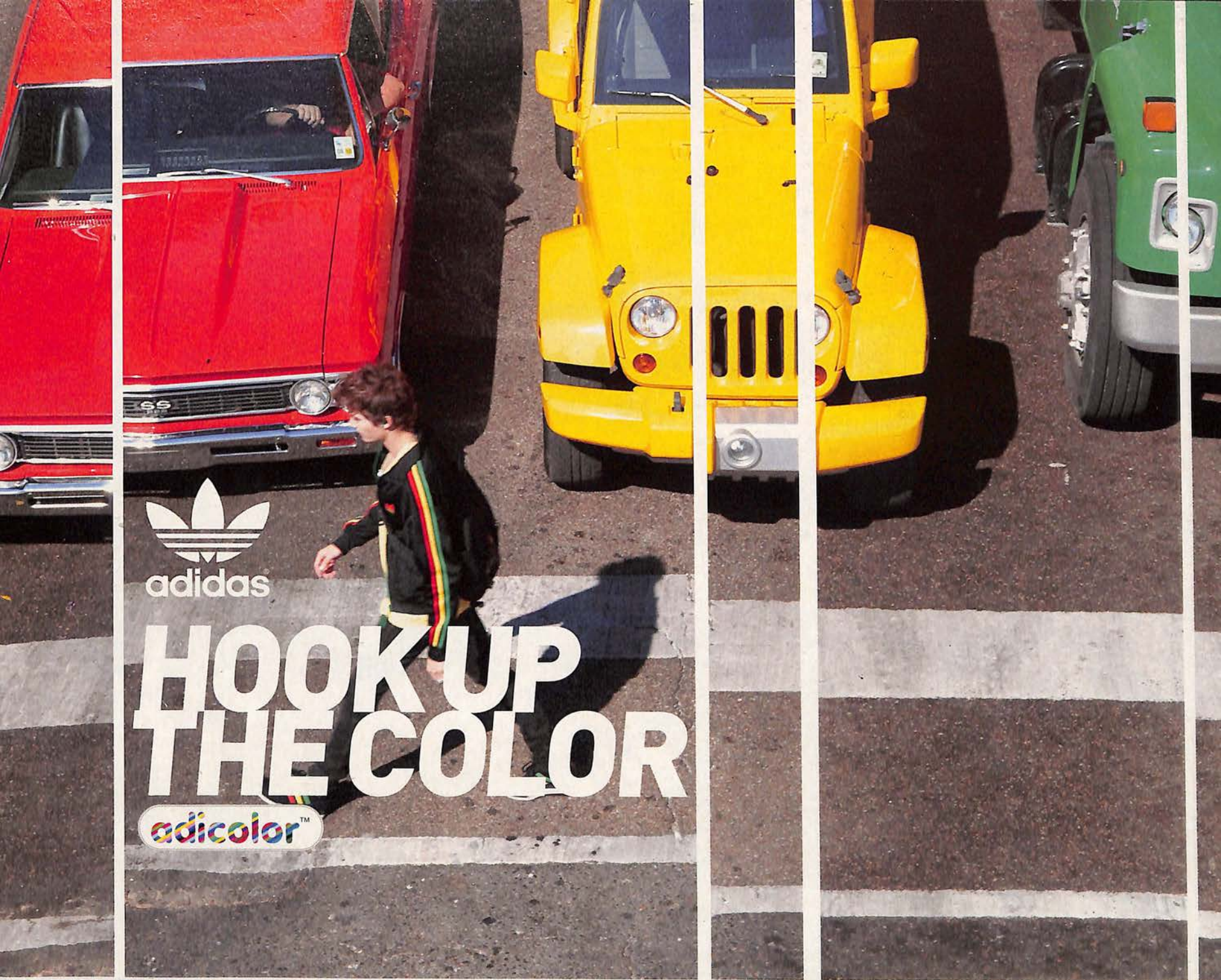
BELLAMY: I'm going to shock them. I don't think they're ready. I'm a tough little character.

SN: The comparisons to Spiller, to Johnson—what do you think about them?

BELLAMY: I think I'm mostly like Chris. Every time he comes down, I talk to him. He says, "Just keep your grades up."

SN: And you'll do that, right?

BELLAMY: Yeah, I'm confident about that. I like school—sometimes. It depends if my girlfriend is having a good day.



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Cam ... a lot

THAT'S WHAT NO. 2 OREGON—LIKE EVERY AUBURN OPPONENT THIS SEASON—CAN EXPECT IN THE BCS NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP GAME. AFTER ALL, THE PERFECT QB IN THE PERFECT SYSTEM HAS HIS TEAM, AMAZINGLY ENOUGH, ON THE VERGE OF PERFECTION.

By Matt Hayes

Every once in a while, a little white lie can't hurt. So it began last March, when the coaching staff at Auburn gathered the quarterbacks and told them there would be no live hitting during spring practice while they competed for the starting job. It was more important, the coaches stressed, that everyone got comfortable with the offense.

In truth, it was more important that no one touched Cam Newton. And that Newton believed he was battling for the starting job.

"Really?" Newton says now.

"Really," Auburn offensive coordinator Gus Malzahn says. "Cam hadn't played a down for us, and we knew he had the potential to change everything."

Everything.

Little did they know that everything—and we mean *everything*—wouldn't change how he played. Not an NCAA investigation into his father Cecil's pay-for-play scheme and the 24/7 scrutiny that rode shotgun. Not the pressures of leading an unbeaten team in the best conference in the nation. Not the one-and-done reality of the BCS race, not the ugly truth of Heisman Trophy voters looking for something—anything—to keep from voting for him.

This story isn't about guilt or innocence or what Cam Newton knew and when he knew it or if he knew it. The NCAA—which has ruled that Newton is eligible "at this time"—or FBI eventually will sort through that rubble.

This is the story of one player shouldering all that weight, all that burden, and playing better than anyone ever has under anything remotely close to those circumstances. Of how a once-forgotten recruit fit perfectly with the game's hottest offensive mind and how it produced the greatest season in Auburn history.

It's not an investigation or a naive coronation; it's a tale of a process that brought a player and a program together to produce the unthinkable.

"Nothing surprises me about Cam anymore," Auburn offensive tackle Lee Ziemba says. "The first day he got here we knew we had something unique."

But how could anyone have known what it would mushroom into?

There's little doubt that recruiting and developing players is the lifeblood of college football. Those successful at procuring talent are usually those playing games to remember in November and December.

But there are times when the convergence of one player and one program ignites something so powerful, so profound, that mundane becomes magical, bland becomes beautiful and what was a pipe dream becomes inconceivable reality.

Like Auburn playing for the national championship. And Newton, a year removed from junior college exile in Blinn, Texas, becoming the most dangerous player in college football.

BOWLING YOU OVER

- ➔ PAGE 35: SCOUTING AUBURN
- ➔ PAGE 36: SCOUTING OREGON
- ➔ PAGE 38: ROSE
- ➔ PAGE 39: FIESTA
- ➔ PAGE 40: ORANGE
- ➔ PAGE 41: SUGAR
- ➔ PAGE 42: THE REST



If Tebow had entered the NFL draft after his junior season, Newton might still be at Florida.

"Look at my hair—you see how gray it is?" Auburn defensive coordinator Ted Roof says. "I've been in this business a long, long time, and a lot of this gray is from figuring out how to stop some incredible players. I'm not sure I've ever seen anyone make the kind of impact Cam has on this team."

Urban Meyer knows all about those rare players. This season, in some cosmic, karmic comeuppance, he was on the other side of it.

It was Meyer who outdueled Alabama five years ago to land an elite dual-threat quarterback recruit named Tim Tebow. With Tebow, Florida was transformed from a nine-win team that couldn't win its division in the rugged SEC to national champion in two of his first three seasons.

Tebow's first year in Gainesville also was Mike Shula's last in Tuscaloosa. Shula was fired, in part, because his team couldn't win games with a stagnant offense. To this day, Shula, now quarterbacks coach with the NFL's Jaguars, refuses to comment about how losing Tebow changed his tenure at Alabama.

Instead, Meyer explains: "Getting Tim Tebow meant everything."

Everything.

The immediate success Meyer had with Tebow helped persuade a raw five-star talent named Cam Newton to sign with Florida in 2007. After playing some as Tebow's backup as a freshman and redshirting

as a sophomore, Newton was suspended following an incident in which he bought a stolen laptop and tossed it out the window when questioned by police.

Meyer says he didn't run off Newton, and Newton says he'd still be at Florida if Tebow hadn't stayed for his senior season. But once Tebow made his decision, Newton transferred to Blinn. He won the junior college national title in his lone season, then signed with Auburn.

And Meyer, whose team struggled to win seven games this fall while forcing pro-style quarterback John Brantley into the spread option, will coach his last game for Florida in a meaningless bowl while hearing this: Did you ever allow yourself to think what could have been?

"No," Meyer says. "No, no, no."

Moments later, he betrays how difficult what turned out to be his final season in Gainesville was. Referring to Newton, he says: "It's really hard to watch him."

Of course it is. Because when the perfect fit comes along, everything comes together.

Cam Newton, at a podium in the bowels of the Georgia Dome earlier this month, read a statement that said, in part, he did nothing wrong and would answer only football-related questions after his nearly flawless performance in leading Auburn to the SEC title and a spot in the BCS national championship game.

No lead is safe

Thanks in great part to quarterback Cam Newton, Auburn had eight come-from-behind victories this season, half of them after trailing by double digits. The details:

SEPTEMBER 4

AUBURN 52, ARKANSAS STATE 26

- ➔ **Largest deficit:** 6-0
- ➔ **Auburn took the lead for good ...** On Kodi Burns' 3-yard run and the PAT, 7-6, with 3:27 left in the first quarter.
- ➔ **Newton's numbers—rushing:** 15-171 yards, 2 TDs; **passing:** 9-14-0, 186 yards, 3 TDs
- ➔ **The word:** "Cam has a lot of work to do right now on our offense in just running it and being where we need to be in this league. For his first football game, I couldn't be prouder of what he did." — *Auburn coach Gene Chizik*

SEPTEMBER 18

AUBURN 27, CLEMSON 24, OT

- ➔ **Largest deficit:** 17-0
- ➔ **Auburn took the lead for good ...** On Wes Byrum's 39-yard field goal on its first OT possession. (Clemson's missed 32-yard field goal attempt ended the game.)
- ➔ **Newton's numbers—rushing:** 17-68 yards, 0 TDs; **passing:** 7-14-2, 203 yards, 2 TDs
- ➔ **The word:** "Everybody started to realize that we can't wait until next time. We had some guys that stood up and starting making some big plays." — *Newton*

SEPTEMBER 25

AUBURN 35, NO. 12 SOUTH CAROLINA 27

- ➔ **Largest deficit:** 20-7
- ➔ **Auburn took the lead for good ...** On Newton's 7-yard pass to Philip Lutzenkirchen and the PAT, 28-27, with 13:35 left in the game.
- ➔ **Newton's numbers—rushing:** 25-176 yards, 3 TDs; **passing:** 16-21-0, 158 yards, 2 TDs
- ➔ **The word:** "It's not hard at all (tackling Newton). He's a good athlete and all, and he deserves what he gets. But it's not hard at all." — *South Carolina LB Shaq Wilson*

OCTOBER 9

AUBURN 37, KENTUCKY 34

- ➔ **Largest deficit:** 7-0
- ➔ **Auburn took the lead for good ...** On Byrum's 24-yard field goal on the game's final play.
- ➔ **Newton's numbers—rushing:** 28-198 yards, 4 TDs; **passing:** 13-21-1, 210 yards, 0 TDs
- ➔ **The word:** "When the game is on the line he wants the ball in his hands, and that's what the quarterback position should do." — *Chizik*

OCTOBER 16

AUBURN 65, NO. 12 ARKANSAS 43

- ➔ **Largest deficit:** 7-0
- ➔ **Auburn took the lead for good ...** On Newton's 15-yard pass to Emory Blake and the PAT, 44-43, with 11:44 left in the game.
- ➔ **Newton's numbers—rushing:** 25-188 yards,

3 TDs; **passing:** 10-14-0, 140 yards, 1 TD

The word: "We are very resilient, and we will refuse to lose." — *Newton*

OCTOBER 30

AUBURN 51, OLE MISS 31

- ➔ **Largest deficit:** 7-0
- ➔ **Auburn took the lead for good ...** On Byrum's 25-yard field goal with 14:07 left in the second quarter.
- ➔ **Newton's numbers—rushing:** 11-45 yards, 0 TDs; **passing:** 18-24-0, 209 yards, 2 TDs; **receiving:** 1-20 yards, 1 TD
- ➔ **The word:** "That (TD reception) was all Cameron right there. ... He's 6-6, so he better come down with the ball." — *Blake*

NOVEMBER 13

AUBURN 49, GEORGIA 31

- ➔ **Largest deficit:** 21-7
- ➔ **Auburn took the lead for good ...** On Onterio McCalebb's 4-yard run with 5:04 left in the third quarter.
- ➔ **Newton's numbers—rushing:** 30-151 yards, 2 TDs; **passing:** 12-15-1, 148 yards, 2 TDs
- ➔ **The word:** "I'm a blessed individual on a blessed team." — *Newton*

NOVEMBER 26

AUBURN 28, NO. 11 ALABAMA 27

- ➔ **Largest deficit:** 24-0
- ➔ **Auburn took the lead for good ...** On



Lutzenkirchen has been on the receiving end of five TDs from Newton this season, but none was bigger than the one that beat Alabama.

Newton's 7-yard pass to Lutzenkirchen and the PAT, 28-27, with 11:55 left in the game.

- ➔ **Newton's numbers—rushing:** 22-39 yards, 1 TD; **passing:** 13-20-0, 216 yards, 3 TDs
- ➔ **The word:** "We knew that we had to shut him down from all the talk about Cam and the Auburn Tigers. We knew that if we shut him down we would have a big chance to win."

— *Alabama LB Courtney Upshaw*

— *Bob Hille*

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COLLEGE FOOTBALL BOWL GUIDE

"I'm very fortunate," Newton said then, "that I have so many people here at Auburn that keep me levelheaded. When I'm down in the dumps, they find a way to keep me up and get me going again."

It was the first time he had spoken publicly since early November, when stories first filtered out that his father and a would-be marketer had concocted a pay-for-play scheme to sell Cam's services to Mississippi State. This much is fact: Cecil Newton told NCAA investigators it happened, and the NCAA deemed that, according to the information it currently has, Cam Newton knew nothing about the scheme.

Now think, for a moment, about Cam Newton. The specifics of what he knew or didn't know are irrelevant; either way, he was choking down pressure and conjecture day after day until the only haven was the football field.

If he knew about the scheme, then he's playing with the reality that, eventually, he'll get caught. If he didn't know about it, then he's playing with the reality that his father tried to sell him.

Either way, he did all he could do: He played. Did he ever.

In four games since the NCAA investigation began—wins over I-AA Chattanooga, Georgia, Alabama and South Carolina—Newton has accounted for 1,303 total yards (1,016 passing, 287 rushing) and 19 touchdowns (13 passing, six rushing) with two turnovers. He led the Tigers back from a 21-7 deficit against Georgia and a 24-0 deficit on the road against defending national champion and bitter rival Alabama.

He made clutch throws (fourth quarter touchdowns to Philip Lutzenkirchen against Georgia and Alabama, a fourth-down conversion against Alabama) and critical runs; he put Auburn in position to win the SEC's fifth consecutive national

championship; and he solidified himself—on the field, at least—as one of the game's greatest players.

"I've been around this game a long time," former Auburn coach Pat Dye says. "I've made it known that I think Tebow was the greatest player to ever play the game. But I think Cam, with all he has done and all he can do, is right there with him."

Now you know why it was so hard for Meyer to watch Newton, why he couldn't contemplate what could've been. Newton, at 6-6, 250, is Tim Tebow with a range of athletic ability Tebow couldn't touch.

Newton runs like a tailback, finding creases and cutbacks and breaking through the back end of secondaries with elite speed. Tebow was a Brahma bull, initiating contact and grinding play after play.

It looks effortless for Newton, his long, graceful strides the opposite of Tebow's choppy, chippy style.

"Everyone looks for the right player," Malzahn says. "Not everyone is fortunate enough to get him."

Two years ago, a plane carrying Gene Chizik landed at a tiny airport in Opelika, Ala. The man who had just been hired as the next coach at Auburn had won five games in two seasons at Iowa State, and when he got off the plane and hit the tarmac, he was booed—lustily—by fans waiting at the hangar.

A year later, while Alabama was wrapping up a national championship season in Year 3 under coach Nick Saban, Auburn was fighting off pesky Northwestern in overtime of a meaningless bowl to avoid its sixth loss. That was the backdrop to a recruiting season in which Chizik was desperate to catch up and Malzahn focused on one player he believed could dramatically change his offense.



The damage Newton can do to defenses with his feet as well as with his arm is what sets him apart as college football's best player.

"There was little doubt that we needed to upgrade certain areas on our team," Chizik says. "I'm not singling out anyone, but there obviously are certain positions on a team that can speed up the process."

Especially, that is, if the player fits the system. And because the system just happens to be the hottest in college football, dramatic change—championship change—has suddenly become reality.

In four seasons as a Division I offensive coordinator at Arkansas, Tulsa and Auburn, Malzahn had never had a true dual-threat quarterback—yet his offenses were among the best in the nation. This was the recruiting pitch to Newton: Without you, the offense will be great; with you, the offense will be unstoppable.

Even through more scrutiny and controversy than any player has played through in any season.

"We're always asked, 'Did you know what you had?'" Malzahn says. "To an extent, we did. But I don't think anyone really understood the magnitude of what it all could be. You're talking about a once-in-a-generation player."

With a once-in-a-lifetime reaction to unimaginable on- and off-field pressure. All Cam Newton did was

take a program spinning its wheels, put it on his back and later add an 800-pound gorilla of an NCAA investigation, then carry it all the way to the national championship game.

"A completely different team," LSU coach Les Miles says. "And other than the quarterback, there's not much that has changed from the previous year."

There's one thing, and it shows just how far-reaching the impact of the right player can be. Chizik—nicknamed Chi-Zook by some in the SEC, in reference to failed Florida coach Ron Zook—is now loved in Auburn.

By the end of last season, the gap between Auburn and Alabama couldn't have been larger. The Tide had won the national championship, hadn't lost an SEC regular-season game since 2007 and had the nation's best coach. Auburn had Chizik and a season that unraveled over the last seven weeks.

A month later, the Tigers signed the perfect fit. And Cam Newton changed everything.

"I just wanted to compete for a job and help out any way I could," Newton says. "I wasn't trying to do anything."

All he did was change everything. And everything never changed *him.

Pick six

Edge

RUSHING



PASSING



DEFENSE



SPECIAL TEAMS



COACHING



INTANGIBLES



SN says

➔ **Matt Hayes:** Auburn's flaws on defense are in the secondary; its strength is an athletic, laterally quick front seven than can disrupt and chase a spread option offense like Oregon's. More important: SEC defenses haven't figured out a way to stop Cam Newton. Don't expect Oregon to, either.

➔ **Dave Curtis:** This one will unfold the way so many Ducks games have—they'll fall behind early, then mount a ferocious second half rally past a weary defense.

GET TO KNOW ... AUBURN

1. Auburn coaches claim they staged a quarterback competition throughout the spring. The rest of the Tigers knew before April Cam Newton would be running the offense. "I remember one practice," offensive tackle Lee Ziemba says. "We ran a quarterback power, and, just watching him attack our defense, that's when I thought, *We might have something special here.*"

2. The Auburn defense, shaky and criticized throughout the season, saved its best for its most recent six quarters. Led by Lombardi award winner Nick Fairley at tackle, Auburn held Alabama (in the second half) and South Carolina to two touchdowns and two field goals in 17 possessions. "It's showing," defensive coordinator Ted Roof says. "We're getting better every week."

3. Count Auburn's offensive line as a quiet strength. Ziemba and center Ryan Pugh are first-team All-SEC selections. And opponents credit

the big guys' minds as much as their muscle. "They have smart linemen," South Carolina defensive tackle Travian Robertson says. "It's like they know exactly how Cam is going to run, and they get to those spots before he does."

4. Freshman tailback Michael Dyer picked the wrong season to have a big year. His 950 rushing yards paled next to fellow freshman Marcus Lattimore's 1,198 for South Carolina. And Dyer's quarterback has stolen most of the buzz surrounding Auburn. The Little Rock, Ark., product should be a difference-maker in a game of great backs.

5. Auburn's plus-5 turnover margin makes it above average in that area. But only 11 Division I-A teams (out of 120) have turned the ball over less often than Auburn's 15 times. Newton's efficiency plus Auburn's fantastic ball security—nine fumbles in 863 plays—have kept this offense thriving.

— Dave Curtis



Auburn's offense had to cover for its defense much of the season, but lately, the unit, led by Lombardi award winner Nick Fairley, has been holding its own.

A season to remember

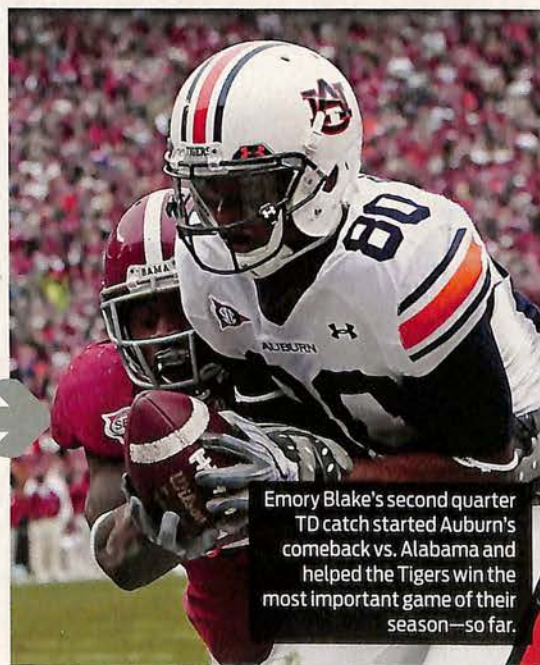
Arkansas State	W, 52-26
@ Mississippi State	W, 17-14
Clemson	W, 27-24 OT
South Carolina	W, 35-27
Louisiana-Monroe	W, 52-3
@ Kentucky	W, 37-34
Arkansas	W, 65-43
LSU	W, 24-17
@ Ole Miss	W, 51-31
Chattanooga	W, 62-24
Georgia	W, 49-31
@ Alabama	W, 28-27

WR DARVIN ADAMS: "For us to come back that day shows a lot about this team. We've done it all year, with the adversity, but that really showed people that we can be a championship team."

— Dave Curtis

vs. South Carolina* W, 56-17

*SEC championship in Atlanta



Emory Blake's second quarter TD catch started Auburn's comeback vs. Alabama and helped the Tigers win the most important game of their season—so far.

The leaders

➔ **Passing:** Cam Newton—165-of-246, 2,589 yards passing, 67.1 percent completion rate, 28 TDs, 6 interceptions.

➔ **Rushing:** Newton—242 carries, 1,409 yards, 20 TDs. Michael Dyer—160 carries, 950 yards, 5 TDs. Ontorio McCalebb—89 carries, 763 yards, 9 TDs.

➔ **Receiving:** Darvin Adams—48 receptions, 909 yards, 7 TDs. Terrell Zachery—38 receptions, 585 yards, 4 TDs.

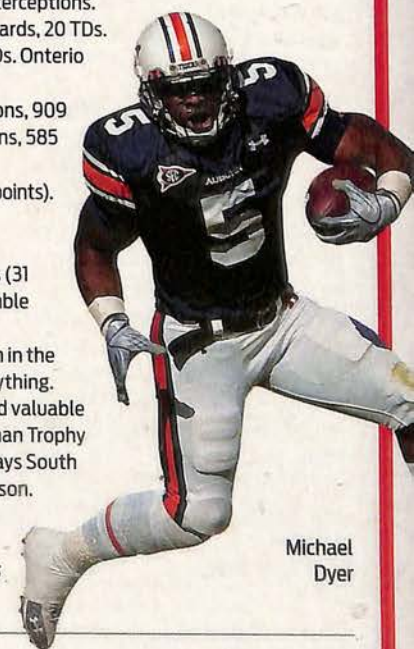
➔ **Scoring:** Newton—21 touchdowns (126 points).

➔ **Defense:** LB Josh Byrnes—71 tackles (34 solo), 5½ tackles for loss, 1 sack, 3 interceptions. DT Nick Fairley—55 tackles (31 solo), 21 tackles for loss, 10½ sacks, 2 fumble recoveries.

➔ **The skinny:** More than any other team in the BCS, Auburn relies on one player for everything. Newton is the game's most dominant and valuable player since Tim Tebow in his 2007 Heisman Trophy season. "He can run and he can throw," says South Carolina defensive tackle Travian Robertson.

"There's no question he's the best player in college football, hands down."

— Dave Curtis



Michael Dyer

See ya on Sunday



Josh Byrnes, MLB, Auburn

Athletic and quick on his feet, Byrnes (6-2, 239) has the speed to chase down plays in pursuit and to be effective in coverage. Plus, he has shown the quickness to get running backs before they hit the holes. Watch closely his ability to read and react against Oregon's fast-paced offense; on film, he often is late reacting to the play and isn't able to recover.

— Former NFL scout Russ Lande

Scheming

Chattanooga coach Russ Huesman says: "You have to do everything humanly possible to take Cam Newton out of the game. I would say Oregon is not going to let him beat them with his feet and legs. You keep somebody close to him at any time, a spy. Then you try to take away the throwing lanes in some capacity, with man coverage or something. Hopefully, they have good enough players to cover people up. If you can get them covered up with a few guys and then say, 'He can't get out of the pocket,' you've got a chance to slow him down and make him one-dimensional throwing the ball."

— Dave Curtis

GET TO KNOW ... OREGON

1. Its high-tempo offense is complemented by its opportunistic defense and special teams. The Ducks are second in the nation in turnovers forced (35) and eighth in tackles for loss (90), plus they have scored on five punt returns and lead the nation in punt return average (18.2 yards). "Those plays change the complexion of games," defensive coordinator Nick Aliotti says.

2. Running back Kenjon Barner and wideout Jeff Maehl aren't big names, but they're critical to the offense. Barner's carries—from a handful per game up to 15 or so—keep star LaMichael James from absorbing a pounding, and Barner has a better average per carry than James (6.5 to 6.0). Maehl is deceptively quick and the best third-down receiver in the nation.

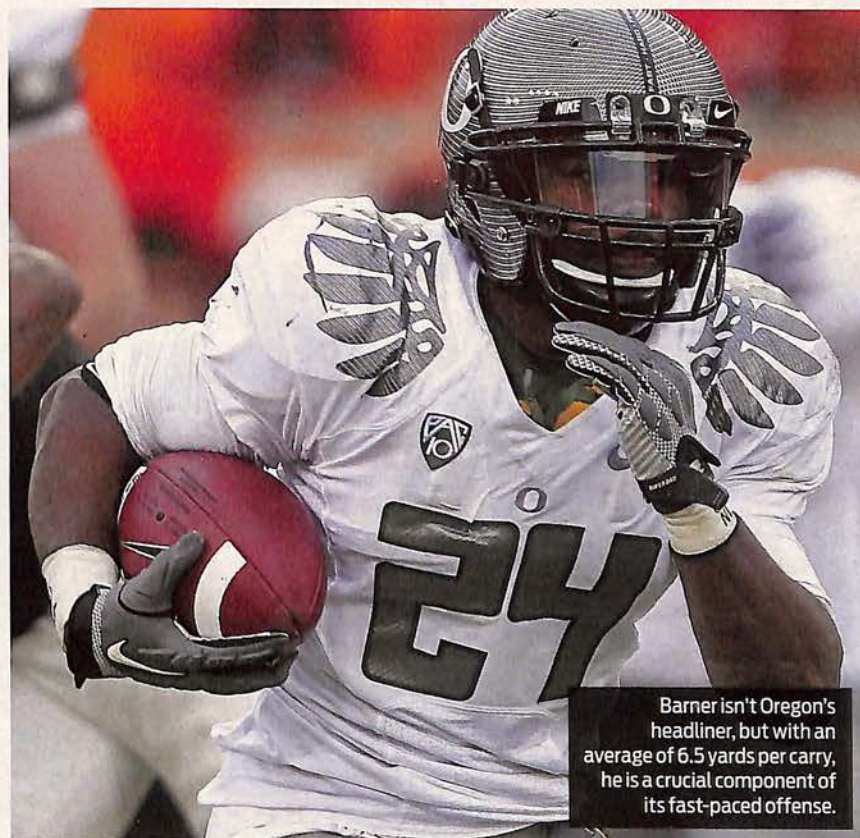
3. Quarterback Darron Thomas is having as good a season statistically as former Oregon star quarterback Dennis Dixon did in 2007, but Thomas hasn't received similar

attention. He has accounted for 33 touchdowns (five rushing); Dixon had 29 (nine rushing) in 2007 before injuring his knee and missing the last three games. "They're very similar," Ducks coach Chip Kelly says, "in their style, leadership and what they mean to this team."

4. In Kelly's first two seasons in Eugene, both as offensive coordinator, his teams scored 98 points in bowl wins over South Florida (38th in scoring defense in 2007) and Oklahoma State (76th in 2008). Last season, Oregon scored 17 in a loss to Ohio State (No. 5). Auburn's scoring defense this season ranks 54th.

5. The best Oregon player you don't hear enough about: cornerback Cliff Harris. He leads the nation in passes defended (20, including five interceptions), is second in punt return average (19.5 yards) and has five returns for touchdowns (four punt, one interception). "He's instant offense," Thomas says. "And he doesn't even play offense."

— Matt Hayes



Barner isn't Oregon's headliner, but with an average of 6.5 yards per carry, he is a crucial component of its fast-paced offense.

A season to remember

New Mexico	W, 72-0
@ Tennessee	W, 48-13
Portland State	W, 69-0
@ Arizona State	W, 42-31
Stanford	W, 52-31
@ Washington State	W, 43-23
UCLA	W, 60-13
@ USC	W, 53-32
Washington	W, 53-16
@ California	W, 15-13

RB LAMICHAEL JAMES: "This showed we can win games no matter what kind of defense teams throw at us. We hadn't seen much zero coverage (no safety help) all season. Their plan was to play man on the outside and use safeties to help in the run game. They wanted to stop the run, so we stayed patient and threw the ball."

— Matt Hayes

Arizona	W, 48-29
@ Oregon State	W, 37-20



Harris' punt return touchdown was key—it got Oregon on the scoreboard—in the Ducks' only truly close game of the season.

The leaders

► **Passing:** Darron Thomas—195-of-321, 2,518 yards, 60.7 percent completion rate, 28 TDs, 7 interceptions.

► **Rushing:** LaMichael James—281 carries, 1,682 yards, 21 TDs. Kenjon Barner—80 carries, 537 yards, 6 TDs. Thomas—85 carries, 563 yards, 5 TDs.

► **Receiving:** Jeff Maehl—68 catches, 943 yards, 12 TDs. D.J. Davis—36 catches, 410 yards, 3 TDs.

► **Scoring:** James—22 TDs (132 points).

► **Defense:** LB Casey Matthews—73 tackles (33 solo), 8½ tackles for loss, 3 sacks, 3 interceptions, 3 fumble recoveries. S John Boyett—67 tackles (42 solo), 1½ for loss, 5 interceptions.

► **The skinny:** The core of the team is its three most recognizable stars: James, Thomas and Matthews. The Ducks can't afford a bad game from any of the three and expect to beat Auburn. The offense must be balanced to take away Auburn's aggressive front seven play, and the defense has to wrap up and limit Tigers quarterback Cam Newton's yards after initial contact.

— Matt Hayes



Darron Thomas

See ya on Sunday



Brandon Bair, DE, Oregon

He's a tall (6-7), well-built (272 pounds) and deceptively athletic end who has the tools to be very good in the right scheme. His ability to make plays against the running game on his side, plus get pressure on the quarterback, gives him the tools to be constantly disruptive. He's not flashy, but he gets the job done.

— Former NFL scout Russ Lande

Scheming

A Pac-10 defensive coordinator says: "I don't think you have to choose which area of the offense you want to stop. You have to plan with both in mind. Their receivers have problems getting off the jam at the line of scrimmage. So you match up and play man and try to put more guys in the box than they can block in the run game. But it doesn't always work in run support because of the zone blocking ability of the line and (LaMichael) James' ability to cut back and create space—and eventually break tackles. And you can't win every individual battle on the outside. The receivers will win eventually, and that's when big plays happen."

— Matt Hayes



THE BCS LIVES HERE



5 WISCONSIN vs. 3 TCU
NEW YEAR'S DAY, 4:30 PM/ET **ESPN HD**



CONNECTICUT vs. 7 OKLAHOMA
NEW YEAR'S DAY, 8:30 PM/ET **ESPN HD** **ESPN 3D**



4 STANFORD vs. 13 VIRGINIA TECH
JANUARY 3RD, 8 PM/ET **ESPN HD**



6 OHIO STATE vs. 8 ARKANSAS
JANUARY 4TH, 8 PM/ET **ESPN HD**



1 AUBURN vs. 2 OREGON
JANUARY 10TH, 8 PM/ET **ESPN HD** **ESPN 3D**

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HOW TO ... STOP TCU'S SPREAD OPTION



By Oregon State DT
Stephen Paea

It's option football, so it's assignment football. The dive is so important. If you can stop that, you limit what else they can do. You have to get pressure on the interior and not allow the play to stretch outside.

But that means you have to beat blocks on the interior, and those guys up front are very good at what they do.

— As told to Matt Hayes

INSIDER'S GUIDE: TCU

➔ **The defense has a distinct identity.** Coach Gary Patterson's fame and success have come from turning top Texas running backs and receivers into ferocious defensive ends and linebackers. His message—blend in as a skill guy or stand out to NFL scouts on D—has delivered a smallish but very speedy defense that allows the fewest points in the nation (11.4).

➔ **The offense is led by a guy who knows what he's doing.** Andy Dalton has won 41 games as a starter, more than any other active quarterback. He is the key to the Frogs' attack. "When he plays well," Wisconsin coach Bret Bielema says, "TCU plays well." And good news for the Frogs: The elbow Dalton banged Thanksgiving weekend against New Mexico should be healed by New Year's.

➔ **The key is Kerley.** The defense dominates, the offense thrives ... and TCU excels on special teams, too. The Frogs rank fifth in the nation in both kick return and punt return average, and Jeremy Kerley is their star. Plus, opponents have burned the Badgers in both areas this season. Wisconsin ranks 103rd in punt return defense and 106th against kick returns.

— Dave Curtis



Andy Dalton

ROSE BOWL

TCU (12-0)
vs. Wisconsin (11-1)

January 1, 5 p.m. ET • ESPN • Pasadena, Calif.



HOW TO ... STOP WISCONSIN'S RUNNING GAME



By Northwestern
coach Pat Fitzgerald

You just have to get off blocks and get the ball on the ground. They're extremely athletic up front. You've got to fit right, you've got to be aggressive. Sometimes, you'll get yourself in a bad spot if you say, "Should I go here? Should I go there?" You've just got to be aggressive and go.

— As told to Dave Curtis

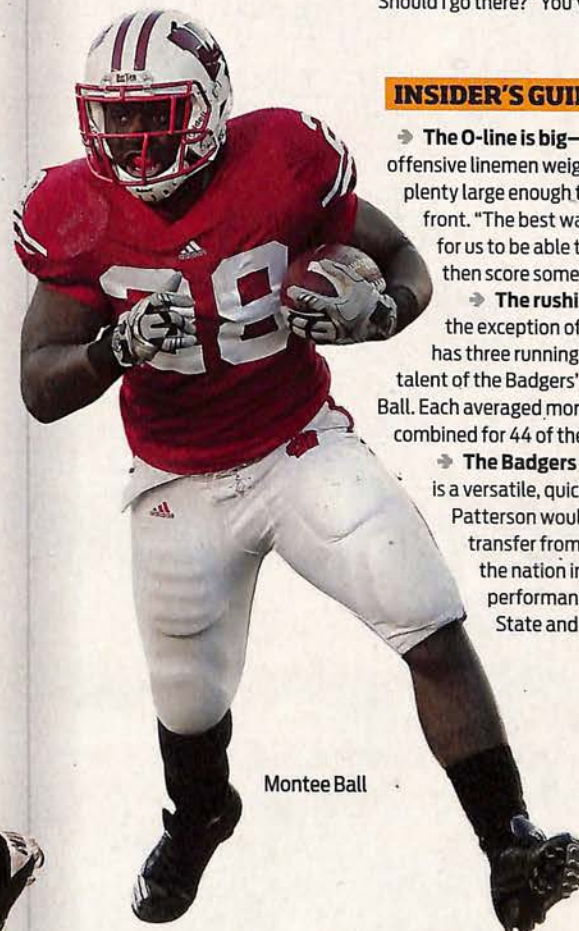
INSIDER'S GUIDE: WISCONSIN

➔ **The O-line is big—really big.** The Badgers' starting offensive linemen weigh between 313 and 327 pounds, plenty large enough to dominate a smallish TCU defensive front. "The best way to keep their offense off the field is for us to be able to move the football, and hold it, and then score some points," Patterson says.

➔ **The rushing attack is three-pronged.** With the exception of Virginia Tech, no team in the nation has three running backs with the experience and talent of the Badgers' James White, John Clay and Montee Ball. Each averaged more than 78 yards per game, and they combined for 44 of the team's 68 touchdowns.

➔ **The Badgers are ballhawks on defense.** J.J. Watt is a versatile, quick defensive end that even TCU's Patterson would covet. A former tight end and a transfer from Central Michigan, Watt ranks third in the nation in tackles for loss and has had his best performances this season in big games—vs. Ohio State and at Iowa.

— Dave Curtis



Montee Ball

Stat shot

89.2

The Horned Frogs thrive at stopping the run; only Boston College and West Virginia have held teams under the 89.2 yards per game TCU allows on the ground. TCU's stingy front will get tested by the Badgers, though, who have run for 247.3 yards per game, 12th-most in the nation.

— Dave Curtis

See ya on Sunday



Gabe Carimi,
LT, Wisconsin

He's very tall (6-7) and has the strength, competitiveness and blocking technique to be effective against most pass rushers. He

doesn't have great feet, though, and struggles protecting against elite speed/edge rushers. Projected as a likely first-round pick before the season, he didn't get off to a great start, but over the second half he got on track and started moving up draft boards.

— Former NFL scout Russ Lande

Pick six

	Edge
RUSHING	W
PASSING	W
DEFENSE	TCU
SPECIAL TEAMS	TCU
COACHING	W
INTANGIBLES	TCU

SN says

➔ **Hayes:** It's all fun and games until non-BCS heavyweight TCU gets its nose bloodied. While we all enjoy the wonder of TCU in the Rose Bowl, let's also glance at reality for a moment: Physical, relentless Wisconsin is on the other sideline.

➔ **Curtis:** In what too many will see as the determinant in whether the Horned Frogs belong in the big time, TCU's defense will dominate the Badgers and score the deciding touchdown.

INSIDER'S GUIDE: CONNECTICUT

➔ **The Huskies had to overcome a lot to get here.** Off-field issues plagued Connecticut during the first half—the starting quarterback was suspended twice, the second time for the rest of the season, and a starting guard was suspended before leaving the team—culminating with a 26-0 loss at Louisville that dropped UConn to 3-4. But the Huskies rallied and haven't lost since—going from 0-2 in the Big East to winning the league with a 5-2 mark. "They had had enough," coach Randy Edsall says. "They said, 'Hey, here's what we're going to do.'"

➔ **They don't call them the trenches for nothing.** UConn's success revolves around controlling the line of scrimmage. The Huskies tied for first in the Big East in tackles for loss—led by sophomore end Jesse Joseph—and ranked first in sacks allowed. Their greatest strength might be the offensive line, with Mike Ryan at tackle and Zach Hurd at guard.

— Dave Curtis



Jesse Joseph



Landry Jones

FIESTA BOWL

Connecticut (8-4)
vs. Oklahoma (11-2)

January 1, 8:30 p.m. ET • ESPN • Glendale, Ariz.

INSIDER'S GUIDE: OKLAHOMA

➔ **Jones is all grown up.** Landry Jones looked lost last year as Sam Bradford's emergency replacement. But the Sooners quarterback settled down as a sophomore, throwing for 4,289 yards and 35 touchdowns. "He's just so much more comfortable, sure of himself," coach Bob Stoops says. Jones has thrown only 11 interceptions in 568 attempts while completing 65.3 percent of his passes.

➔ **The defense has a weakness.** As usual, Oklahoma's defense comes chock-full of future pros, led by likely first-rounder Jeremy Beal at end. But, in a bit of a departure, the group ranks seventh in the Big 12 against the run, and the unit had trouble with Air Force's and Nebraska's ground-based attacks, which bodes well for Connecticut's 1,500-yard rusher, Jordan Todman.

— Dave Curtis

Stat shot

PLUS-12

The Huskies' turnover margin was key to the five-game winning streak that won them the Big East. The interceptions and forced fumbles have led to short fields for a UConn offense that ranks No. 112 in passing. Oklahoma is no slouch in this area, either, with a plus-14 margin in its 13 games.

— Dave Curtis

See ya on Sunday



Jeremy Beal,
DE, Oklahoma

He's a thickly built (6-3, 267), very powerful and athletic defender who is strong both rushing the passer and playing the run. He improved dramatically in 2010, playing with better leverage, using his hands better and being more aggressive on every snap, which made him more consistently productive this season than he has ever been previously.

— Former NFL scout Russ Lande

Pick six

	Edge
RUSHING	OU
PASSING	OU
DEFENSE	OU
SPECIAL TEAMS	C
COACHING	OU
INTANGIBLES	C

SN says

➔ **Hayes:** This is an unholy mismatch. Watch Oklahoma exploit every advantage, roll to a big win and gain great momentum for 2011. Don't even think about another letdown for the Sooners, who desperately need a BCS bowl win after five straight losses.

➔ **Curtis:** Everything in this matchup screams Sooners ... except the program's big-game history. Jordan Todman and the Huskies will continue OU's problems in January. Connecticut 21, Oklahoma 20.

PLAYER TO WATCH

JORDAN TODMAN, CONNECTICUT RB

➔ **The numbers:** Todman, the Big East offensive player of the year, has rushed for more than 100 yards in nine of the 11 games he has played in this season. That adds up to 1,574 yards and an average of 143.1 per game, which ranks second in the nation behind Oregon running back LaMichael James' 152.9. Todman also has a nose for the goal line: He has 14 rushing touchdowns, which is almost half of UConn's 30 total offensive TDs this season.

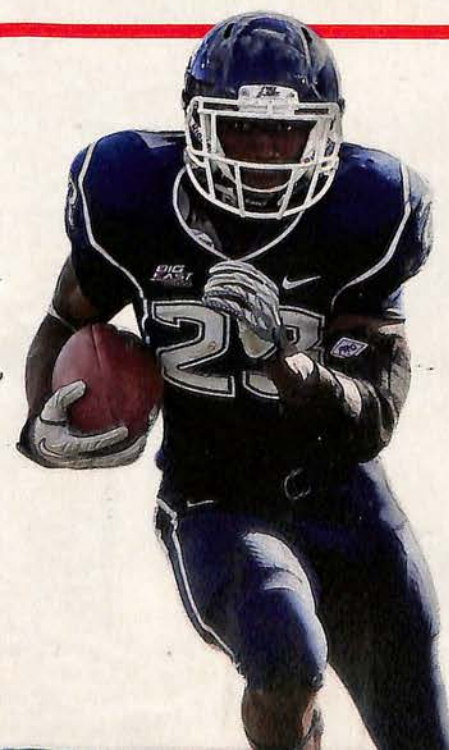
➔ **Did you know ...** Todman has been an avid snowboarder since he was 10 years old. During the winter, he regularly hits the New Hampshire slopes with his family.

➔ **What's on tap:** The Huskies had 200 passing yards just twice this season—at

Michigan, a game in which they never led, and against Buffalo. Twice, they didn't reach 100 yards. So expect UConn to rely on Todman for the bulk of its production again.

➔ **What they're saying:** "Jordan did a good job in the offseason to build his strength and endurance on what he already had as a sophomore. He's a tremendous competitor who's willing to do whatever he has to for the team to win. The (arm) injury he had this year never slowed him down; he got back out there as soon as possible. He works very hard at his craft, and it shows on the field." — Connecticut coach Randy Edsall

— Ken Bradley



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HOW TO... STOP STANFORD'S BALANCED OFFENSE



By Oregon LB
Casey Matthews

It starts with quarterback Andrew Luck. He's a great player. But you can't sit back and let them do what they want and react to what they do. You've got to be aggressive, stop the run and then go after Luck and the passing game. We let them sort of dictate what they wanted early and fell behind. We changed in the second half and started to force them to react to what we were doing. Different blitzes, different coverages, mixing things up.

— As told to Matt Hayes

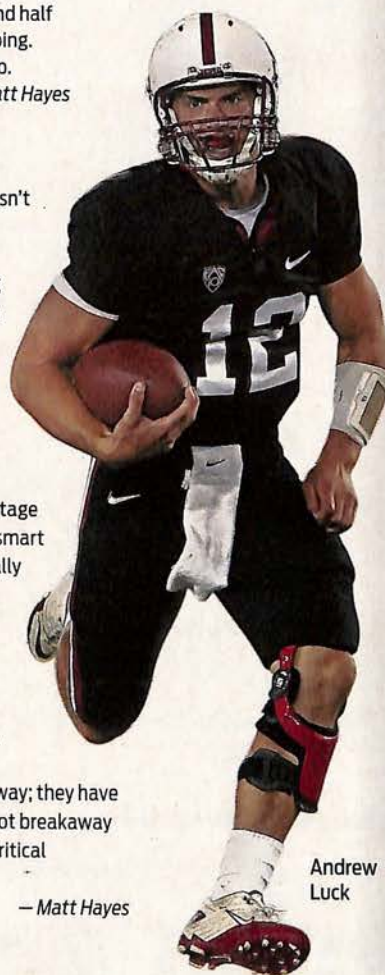
INSIDER'S GUIDE: STANFORD

➔ **It's all about attitude.** Coach Jim Harbaugh wasn't kidding when he said the Cardinal want to win with character—and cruelty. When he arrived on the Farm, Stanford was the worst team in the Pac-10 and getting physically whipped in a league known more for finesse than fight. So Harbaugh focused on the interior lines, landed a couple of key recruits (see: Andrew Luck) and now the Cardinal are among the nation's elite.

➔ **No team looks and feels more like an NFL team than Stanford.** The offense, built around a quarterback who could be the top pick in the 2011 NFL draft, is a play-action-based scheme that takes advantage of Stanford's physicality and Luck's accurate arm and smart decision making. The defense has improved dramatically under Harbaugh and coordinator (and longtime NFL assistant) Vic Fangio, from one of the worst in the nation to 24th this season.

➔ **Everything revolves around the running game.** It's all Luck all the time, right? Look closer: Stanford has thrown the ball 356 times and run it 504. Toby Gerhart is gone, but Stepfan Taylor (1,000-yard season), Anthony Wilkerson and Tyler Gaffney grind away; they have produced more than 1,600 yards and 22 TDs. They're not breakaway backs, but they set up play-action passes and form a critical component in the offense.

— Matt Hayes



Andrew Luck



ORANGE BOWL

**Stanford (11-1)
vs. Virginia Tech (11-2)**

January 3 • 8:30 p.m. ET • ESPN • Miami

HOW TO... STOP VIRGINIA TECH RBs RYAN WILLIAMS, DARREN EVANS AND DAVID WILSON



By Boise State DE
Ryan Winterswyk

Their offensive line is very strong, and you can tell they're well-coached. Then you add three really good running backs to the equation. You have to wrap up, that's first and foremost. You can't one-arm tackle those guys. You need multiple guys running to the ball and gang tackling. They get stronger as the game goes on, and your effort has to match theirs. They break tackles in the fourth quarter, and they make big plays in the fourth quarter.

— As told to Matt Hayes

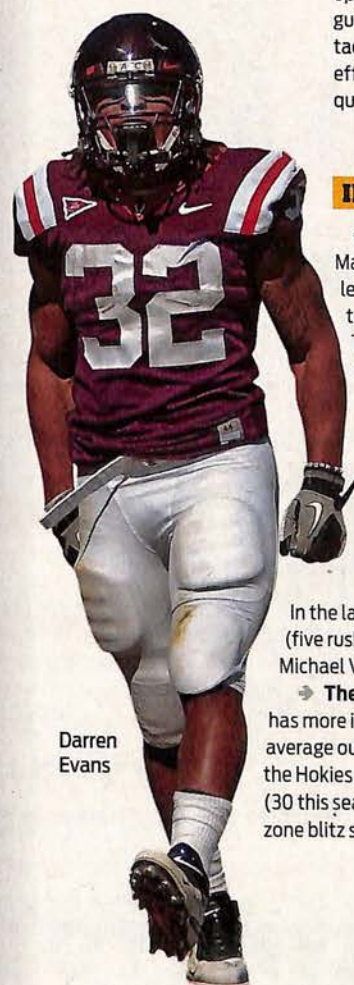
INSIDER'S GUIDE: VIRGINIA TECH

➔ **Team chemistry is powerful.** After a loss to I-AA James Madison dropped the Hokies to 0-2, quarterback Tyrod Taylor led a group of seniors who insisted—wait, *demand*—in a team meeting that the season was far from over. Virginia Tech won its next 11 games, and this has been—by far—the most satisfying season in coach Frank Beamer's successful career in Blacksburg. A team that could've tanked won its third ACC title in four years.

➔ **The offense is more balanced than ever.** We know all about the three tailbacks who could start for just about any team and Taylor's running ability. But it's Taylor's oft-criticized arm that has made this offense so dangerous. He has completed 60.6 percent of his passes and thrown 23 touchdowns with just four interceptions. In the last eight games, Taylor has accounted for 20 touchdowns (five rushing) with just one interception—and drawn comparisons to Michael Vick from Beamer.

➔ **The Hokies are ballhawks on defense.** No one in the nation has more interceptions since 2000 than Virginia Tech. Those 211 picks average out to 19 a season—including 22 this year. Want to know why the Hokies are always so proficient on defense? It's turnovers gained (30 this season) plus sacks (33) in defensive coordinator Bud Foster's zone blitz schemes.

— Matt Hayes



Darren Evans

Stat shot

PLUS-32

Any coach at any level will tell you turnover margin wins games. Virginia Tech leads the nation at plus-18, and Stanford is tied for No. 3 (plus-14), a bloated combination of plus-32. Part of the reason: The two quarterbacks rarely make mistakes (11 interceptions combined).

— Matt Hayes

See ya on Sunday



Tyrod Taylor,
QB, Virginia Tech

With an impressive senior season, he has intrigued NFL scouts with his potential. At about 6-1, he lacks ideal size, but he has a very strong arm and good intangibles and is an elite athlete. Before this season he was viewed as a great athlete who lacked good passing skills, but he has displayed much better patience in the pocket and overall throwing ability. He does a great job of moving around in the pocket to buy time while keeping his head up and eyes downfield to find a receiver.

— Former NFL scout Russ Lande

Pick six

	Edge
RUSHING	VT
PASSING	S
DEFENSE	VT
SPECIAL TEAMS	VT
COACHING	S
INTANGIBLES	S

SN says

➔ **Hayes:** This is the second-best BCS bowl (behind the Sugar) with a ton of future NFL draft picks. Virginia Tech has the toughest defense Andrew Luck has faced all year, but the Cardinal will win their first major bowl since the Rose after the 1971 season.

➔ **Curtis:** Stanford's defense shut out Oregon State last time out, and its Luck-led balanced offense is better than any the Hokies have seen this season.

HOW TO ... STOP RYAN MALLETT AND ARKANSAS' PASSING GAME



By Auburn LB Josh Byrnes

You have to disrupt his timing. If he can set himself and throw, you're in trouble. You have to force him to move around a little. He throws well on the run, too, but you've got a much better chance of success if he's running and scrambling and trying to throw than you do if he's standing tall in the pocket. I mean, if he's set and throws, it's over. He's just too good, and the ball comes out too fast and accurate.

— As told to Matt Hayes

INSIDER'S GUIDE: ARKANSAS

➔ **It's not all through the air.** Get to know tailback Knile Davis. He may just be the best running back you've never heard of. The myth of the Arkansas offense under Bobby Petrino is the Hogs chuck it and hope for the best. Reality: They've thrown it only 28 more times than they've run it. And Davis, with his 6.6 yards per carry (and 1,183 yards rushing) is the backbone of the running game.

➔ **They really do play defense at Arkansas.** When Petrino arrived, defense was an afterthought. Three years later, the Hogs are 34th in the nation in total defense and have legitimate SEC athletes (linebacker Jerry Franklin, end Jake Bequette) all over the starting 11. In other words, they can win by forcing turnovers (25) and getting off the field (No. 6 in the nation in third-down efficiency).

➔ **Petrino is the game's best play-caller.** And, really, it's not close. No one knows how to attack defenses and how to string together plays like Petrino. It's part timing, part preparation and part audacity. Of course, it's easier to call a game with little fear if you have some of the best skill players in the SEC, and Petrino does in Mallett, Davis and wideout Jarius Wright. Throw in terrific tight end D.J. Williams and the Hogs will score on any defense.

— Matt Hayes



SUGAR BOWL



Arkansas (10-2) vs. Ohio State (11-1)

January 4, 8:30 p.m. ET • ESPN • New Orleans



Ryan Mallett



Terrelle Pryor

HOW TO ... STOP TERRELLE PRYOR AND OHIO STATE'S OFFENSE



By Wisconsin DE J.J. Watt

Terrelle Pryor is an outstanding football player, and he's got a lot of guys around him who can make plays. I don't think you're thinking, *Let's take away this*. You just have to focus on your fundamentals and be sharp, or they will beat you.

— As told to Dave Curtis

INSIDER'S GUIDE: OHIO STATE

➔ **As Terrelle Pryor goes, so go the Buckeyes.** In his first two seasons at Ohio State, Pryor was hit-and-miss and got lost in some games. He's more mentally tough now, and his passing skills are developing. But in the three toughest games of the season (Miami, Wisconsin and Iowa), Pryor completed just 50 percent of his passes with only two touchdowns and three interceptions.

➔ **It starts up front on defense.** Despite all the hype their linebackers and defensive backs have received over the years, for the Buckeyes, it comes down to controlling the line of scrimmage. This year, it begins inside with stout but undersized tackles Dexter Larimore and John Simon and on the edge with star end Cameron Heyward. The Buckeyes try to make teams one-dimensional before using blitz packages to pressure the quarterback and create turnovers.

➔ **The Buckeyes are deceptively efficient.** Look at running back Boom Herron. He's not particularly fast or overpowering, nor do his stats jump out at you (only three 100-yard games this season). But he just keeps coming, play after play. And Ohio State doesn't give up on the run. It's what the Buckeyes do; it's what coach Jim Tressel preaches. Ohio State is at its best when Herron and Pryor are getting positive yards on the ground and Pryor can throw off play-action with safeties creeping up.

— Matt Hayes

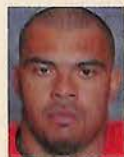
Stat shot

425

As good as Arkansas' defense has been, the Hogs have struggled against dual-threat quarterbacks. Ole Miss' Jeremiah Masoli had 425 total yards (327 and three TDs passing, 98 rushing) in a 38-24 loss to the Hogs. Auburn's Cam Newton racked up 328 yards (140 and one TD passing, 188 and three TDs rushing) in a 65-43 Tigers victory.

— Matt Hayes

See ya on Sunday



Cameron Heyward, DE, Ohio State

He's a big (6-5, 288), well-built lineman who has shown the strength to be good at the point of attack. He uses his hands well and is athletic but hasn't played as well this season as he has in previous seasons. Lining up frequently against Arkansas tackle DeMarcus Love, projected to go in the first or second round, will give Heyward a chance to show his stuff.

— Former NFL scout Russ Lande

Pick six

RUSHING



PASSING



DEFENSE



SPECIAL TEAMS



COACHING



INTANGIBLES

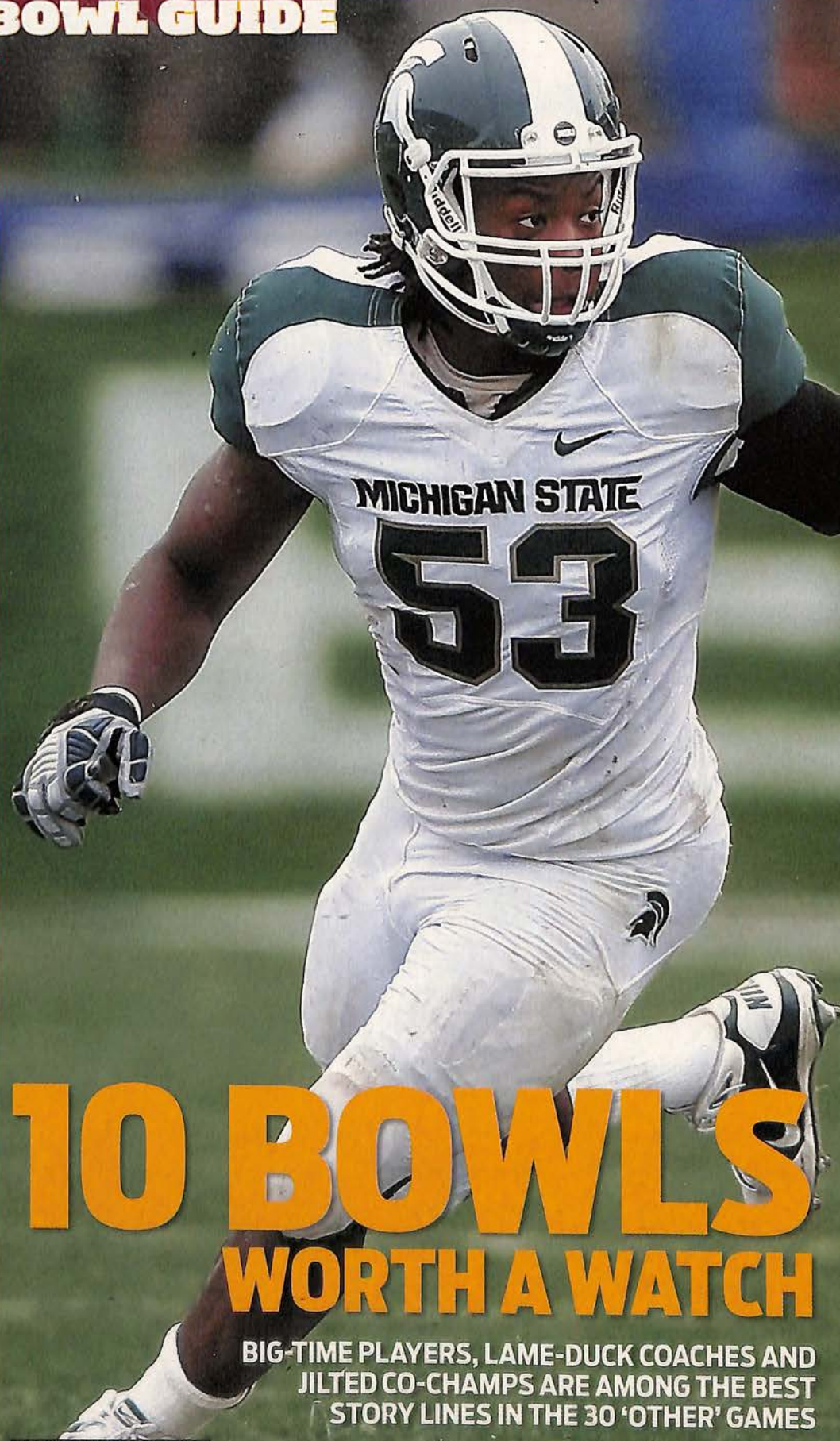


Edge

SN says

➔ **Hayes:** Let's see, Ohio State has never beaten an SEC team in a bowl. The Buckeyes' last two games against SEC teams were horrific blowouts—of much better Ohio State teams. I'll take the Hogs to make it seven straight wins to end the season.

➔ **Curtis:** Bank on another big bowl performance from Buckeyes QB Terrelle Pryor. And OSU's defense, with five weeks to prep, will slow down the Hogs.



10 BOWLS WORTH A WATCH

**BIG-TIME PLAYERS, LAME-DUCK COACHES AND
JILTED CO-CHAMPS ARE AMONG THE BEST
STORY LINES IN THE 30 'OTHER' GAMES**

Jones and his Michigan State team will be plenty motivated to win the Capital One Bowl, but so will their Alabama opponents.

1.

CAPITAL ONE BOWL → JANUARY 1
ALABAMA VS. MICHIGAN STATE

No non-BCS game pairs two stronger teams. Watch for motivation here: The Tide blew a 24-point lead to Auburn last time out, and the Big Ten co-champ Spartans feel jilted after being left out of the Rose Bowl.

2.

OUTBACK BOWL → JANUARY 1
FLORIDA VS. PENN STATE

Speaking of which ... happy trails, Urban Meyer. His championship era at Florida ends with a New Year's Day matinee. Perhaps more important, the matchup pits two young teams hoping to build momentum for a better 2011.

3.

LAS VEGAS BOWL → DECEMBER 22
BOISE STATE VS. UTAH

Someone has to pay for the Broncos' stumble against Nevada. How fitting that it's Utah, which next year moves to first-class seating in the Pac-12—while Boise State stays in coach with the Mountain West.

4.

COTTON BOWL → JANUARY 7
LSU VS. TEXAS A&M

Inserting Ryan Tannehill at quarterback sparked a midseason metamorphosis for the Aggies, who looked like a top 10 team down the stretch. LSU's will rank among the best defenses A&M has faced, a group that took the Tigers to the brink of a BCS game.

5.

CHICK-FIL-A BOWL → DECEMBER 31
FLORIDA STATE VS. SOUTH CAROLINA

'Noles coach Jimbo Fisher has already humiliated one Gators coach into retirement. How will he fare in Year 1 against another (former) Florida coach?

6.

GATOR BOWL → JANUARY 1
MICHIGAN VS. MISSISSIPPI STATE

The Rich Rodriguez Watch comes to Jacksonville—lose to the Bulldogs and the coach's time at Michigan might be done. He arrives with a healthy Denard Robinson at quarterback and a defense that stopped nobody in Big Ten play.

7.

SUN BOWL → DECEMBER 31
MIAMI VS. NOTRE DAME

Catholics vs. Conv... uh, *Choirboys*. Maybe they'll cordially agree to disagree in the tunnel about who has fallen further faster.

8.

INSIGHT BOWL → DECEMBER 28
IOWA VS. MISSOURI

Watch how fast Mizzou quarterback Blaine Gabbert's NFL stock rises after he carves up an Iowa team that tanked the last month of the season. Goodbye, Columbia; hello, Cardinals.

9.

ALAMO BOWL → DECEMBER 29
ARIZONA VS. OKLAHOMA STATE

Think old school Holiday Bowl—a Pac-10 vs. Big 12 shootout—transported east to San Antonio. Star receivers Justin Blackmon (Cowboys) and Juron Criner (Wildcats) can dominate a game, but OSU back Kendall Hunter will be the best talent on the turf.

10.

CHAMPS SPORTS BOWL → DECEMBER 28
N.C. STATE VS. WEST VIRGINIA

Good guy Mountaineers coach Bill Stewart isn't safe yet. A top five defense and elite skill players on offense should have translated into a BCS bowl—not scrambling to win a meaningless game to save his job.

— Dave Curtis, Matt Hayes

AND NOW, THE REST OF THE STORIES

SN breaks down the whos, whens
and winners in the non-BCS games

ALL TIMES EASTERN

NEW ORLEANS

NEW ORLEANS • 9 P.M., ESPN

Ohio (8-4) vs. Troy (7-5)

→ **SN's pick:** Troy. The Trojans can score points (32.9 per game) and pile up yards (441.1 per game) behind QB **Corey Robinson**. The Bobcats (28.0 points, 327.6 yards per game) won't keep pace.

→ **Sherrod Martin, Panthers and 2004-08**

Troy DB, agrees: "They believe in what they're doing down there. Guys come in, they put in the work. Guys before me, like DeMarcus Ware, like Osi (Umenyiora), guys I played with, like Leodis McKelvin and Elbert Mack.... That's motivation for the next group coming up."



DEC.
18

ST. PETERSBURG

ST. PETERSBURG, FLA. • 8 P.M., ESPN

Louisville (6-6) vs. Southern Miss (8-4)

→ **SN's pick:** Southern Miss. The Golden Eagles have topped 30 points in eight straight games, and QB Austin Davis has racked up 2,898 passing yards and 18 TD passes with only six interceptions.

→ **Carl Allen, former St. Louis Cardinals and 1974-76 Southern Miss CB, agrees:** "I was impressed with all phases of our game this season—offense, defense and coaching staff. Austin Davis is a good passer and seems like he's a good field general. Southern Miss is fast, period—even the linemen. Everybody can run."

DEC.
21

POINSETTIA

SAN DIEGO • 8 P.M., ESPN

Navy (8-3) vs. San Diego State (8-4)

→ **SN's pick:** Navy. Bet you didn't see the Middies' 22-point Texas Bowl ruination of Missouri coming in 2009. Their ground machine is all about execution, and extra bowl practices will get the flexbone oiled up to mass-produce on the Aztecs' home field.

→ **Roger Staubach, former Cowboys QB and 1963 Navy Heisman winner, agrees:** "Navy sure can beat San Diego State. They have a great team, a great quarterback in Ricky Dobbs, and they are well-coached. If they stay away from penalties and turnovers, they'll do well."

DEC.
23

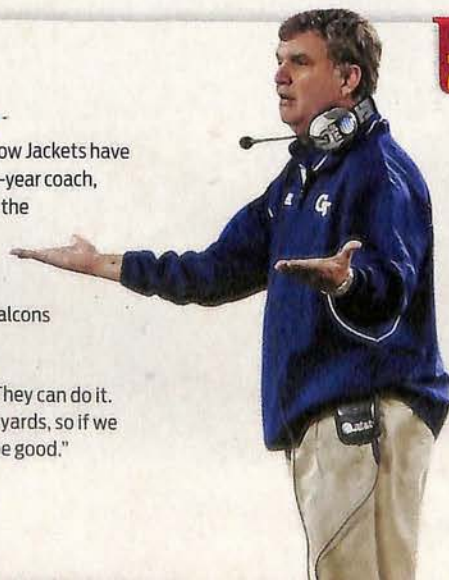
INDEPENDENCE

SHREVEPORT, LA. • 5 P.M., ESPN2

Air Force (8-4) vs. Georgia Tech (6-6)

→ **SN's pick:** Georgia Tech. The Yellow Jackets have yet to win a bowl game under their third-year coach, but **Paul Johnson** has great regard for the service academies—there should be no worries Tech won't be as into this game as Air Force. Also: Johnson's Navy teams won five straight over the Falcons from 2003-07.

→ **Tashard Choice, Cowboys and 2005-07 Georgia Tech RB, agrees:** "They can do it. There's bound to be a bunch of rushing yards, so if we can just stop their option, I think we'll be good."



DEC.
27

NEW MEXICO

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. • 2 P.M., ESPN

BYU (6-6) vs. UTEP (6-6)

→ **SN's pick:** BYU. UTEP lost five of its last six. BYU's six losses were to teams that were a combined 55-19 (.743), and as true freshman QB Jake Heaps got more experience, the offense got better. Proof: BYU won four of its last five, and the average margin was 31.3 points.

→ **Lucas Reed, All-MWC TE whose New Mexico team lost to both, agrees:** "From an individual and team perspective, BYU is very well-coached and a mature team. They are organized and show little to no mistakes offensively and defensively."

DEC.
18

HUMANITARIAN

BOISE, IDAHO • 5:30 P.M., ESPN

Fresno State (8-4) vs. Northern Illinois (10-3)

→ **SN's pick:** Fresno State. NIU has the better record and a premier running back (Chad Spann), but Fresno State has the Humanitarian Bowl pedigree: The Bulldogs beat Virginia in 2004 and Georgia Tech in '07. Plus, Fresno is more athletic (see: DL Chris Carter).

→ **Mark Criner, defensive coordinator of the Idaho team that lost to Fresno, agrees:** "The running back (Robbie Rouse) has 1,000 yards, they have athletic wideouts, and the quarterback makes good decisions. And the defense is getting better and better."

DEC.
18

LAS VEGAS

LAS VEGAS • 8 P.M., ESPN

Boise State (11-1) vs. Utah (10-2)

→ **SN's pick:** Boise State. The Broncos have a history of exemplary bowl performances, especially when they have something to prove. After a heartbreaking loss to Nevada, this game certainly qualifies.

→ **Dave Wilcox, Pro Football Hall of Famer and 1961-62 Boise State LB, agrees:** "They do everything pretty darn well, and Utah's quarterback (Jordan Wynn, shoulder) is hurt. (Boise State QB) **Kellen Moore**, he just seems to get the ball where it needs to go, when it needs to get there."



DEC.
22

HAWAII

HONOLULU • 8 P.M., ESPN

Hawaii (10-3) vs. Tulsa (9-3)

→ **SN's pick:** Hawaii. This could be a shootout. Hawaii's offense is ranked No. 1 in the nation in passing, and Tulsa's is a top 10 scoring unit. The Warriors' 1,000-yard receivers (Greg Salas and Kealoha Pilares) will be the difference.

→ **Andy Buh, defensive coordinator of the Nevada team whose only loss this season came against Hawaii, agrees:** "Salas and Pilares catch everything. But when you prepare for Hawaii's passing game, you can't put all your eggs in that basket or they'll rip you in the run game."

DEC.
24

LITTLE CAESARS

DETROIT • 8:30 P.M., ESPN

Florida International (6-6) vs. Toledo (8-4)

→ **SN's pick:** Toledo. FIU's record is deceiving because it opened with four straight losses to BCS-league teams—three of which are in bowls. But Toledo is peaking at the right time—the Rockets have won five of their last six, led by 1,000-yard WR **Eric Page**.

→ **Bruce Gradkowski, Raiders and 2002-05 Toledo QB, agrees:** "Toledo has some athletic guys that make plays. FIU always has speed, so it'll be a good matchup for us, but I think if Toledo's D plays tough and the offense gets the ball in their playmakers' hands, they'll be just fine."

DEC.
26

CHAMPS SPORTS

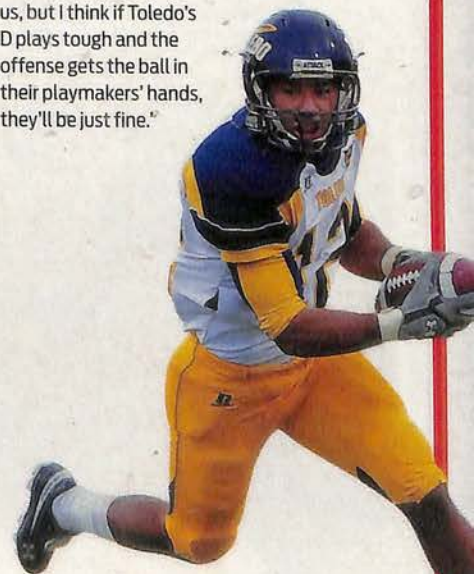
ORLANDO • 6:30 P.M., ESPN

N.C. State (8-4) vs. West Virginia (9-3)

→ **SN's pick:** West Virginia. The Mountaineers were a field goal away from a BCS berth. QB Geno Smith is coming off his best game of the season (28-for-28, 352 yards).

→ **Don Nehlen, 1980-2000 West Virginia coach, agrees:** "West Virginia is probably a little quicker than North Carolina State, and they probably have just a few more players.... The defense has been really good all year, but I don't think we've played against scrambling quarterbacks like (Russell Wilson). He can hurt you with his feet and also with his arm."

DEC.
28



COLLEGE FOOTBALL BOWL GUIDE

INSIGHT

TEMPE, ARIZ. • 10 P.M., ESPN

Iowa (7-5) vs. Missouri (10-2)

→ **SN's pick: Missouri.** In a battle of strengths—Missouri's defense against Iowa QB Ricky Stanzi—Missouri will have the edge.

→ **Ed Blaine, former NFL and 1961**

Missouri All-American G, agrees: "The University of Missouri has a great coach in **Gary Pinkel**. Great coaches make great teams. He has a quality of solidness that says, *This is the way we're going to play the game. It's not going to be flashy, but it's going to be consistent.* The program is very, very strong, and that's attributable exclusively to Pinkel."



MILITARY

WASHINGTON, D.C. • 2:30 P.M., ESPN

East Carolina (6-6) vs. Maryland (8-4)

→ **SN's pick: Maryland.** The Terrapins weren't prolific on offense, but expect the unit, which scored at least 38 points in five games, to run up and down the field against an ECU defense ranked last—120th—in yards allowed.

→ **Jonathan Claiborne, 1975-77**

Maryland S, agrees: "Maryland has improved each week this season. Redshirt freshman QB Danny O'Brien, who recently was selected ACC rookie of the year, continues to mature and has been adept at getting the ball to Maryland's playmakers at wide receiver."

ARMED FORCES

DALLAS • NOON., ESPN

Army (6-5) vs. SMU (7-6)

→ **SN's pick: SMU.** Bowl games are about big plays and risk taking. SMU coach June Jones' offense will provide plenty of both. Army's run-first, run-only offense will not.

→ **Harvey Armstrong, 1981 SMU**

All-American DT, agrees: They're playing right at their stadium on campus. They play very well there. That will give them a huge advantage. I love their receivers. I love Ryan Smith, the safety. I love watching 56 (LB Ja'Gared Davis). I think he's going to be a pretty good kid and play at the next level."



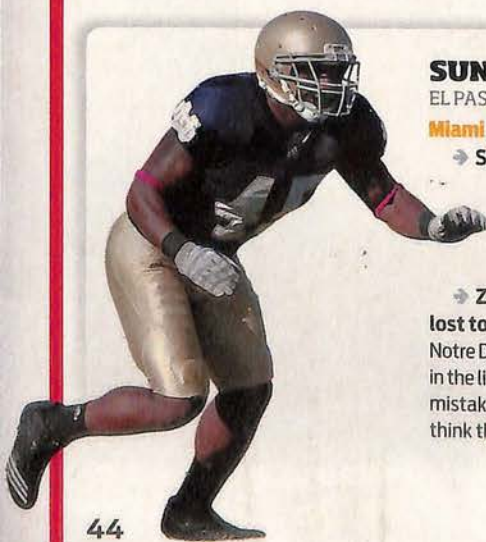
MUSIC CITY

NASHVILLE • 6:40 P.M., ESPN

North Carolina (7-5) vs. Tennessee (6-6)

→ **SN's pick: Tennessee.** The Vols have the chance, after starting 2-6, to finish above .500. What's more, they already have won this season at Vanderbilt, Memphis and, of course, in Knoxville—they have to add the Titans' digs to their home-state stadium tour. RB **Tauren Poole** could have a big day against the Tar Heels' 95th-ranked rush defense.

→ **Jason Allen, Texans and 2002-05 Tennessee DB, agrees:** "We'll win. It's going to be like a home game for Tennessee. The 12th man will be the difference in the game."



SUN

EL PASO, TEXAS • 2 P.M., CBS

Miami (7-5) vs. Notre Dame (7-5)

→ **SN's pick: Notre Dame.** Both teams struggled this season, but the Fighting Irish are at least riding a three-game win streak coming into the bowl. LB **Darius Fleming** anchors a defense that has been stingy of late.

→ **Zane Taylor, All-Conference Utah OL whose team lost to Notre Dame, agrees:** "One of the things about Notre Dame is they are incredibly disciplined. They take pride in the little things, and not once did I see them really make a mistake. They played sound defense the whole night, and I think that'll be part of their edge."

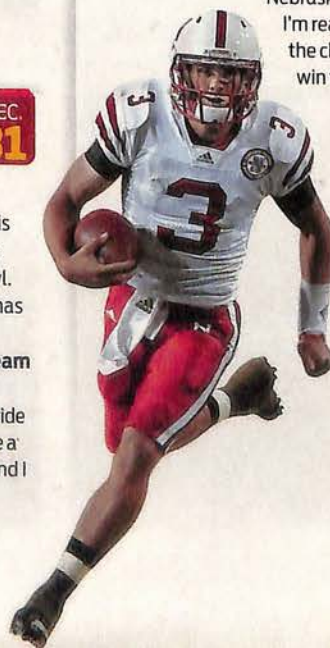
HOLIDAY

SAN DIEGO • 10 P.M., ESPN

Nebraska (10-3) vs. Washington (6-6)

→ **SN's pick: Nebraska.** In his third career start, Nebraska QB **Taylor Martinez** beat Washington, 56-21, and rushed for 137 yards and three TDs and passed for 150 yards and another score, outperforming Huskies counterpart Jake Locker. This could be another blowout.

→ **Grant Wistrom, former NFL and 1994-97 Nebraska All-American DE, agrees:** "Bo Pelini has reinstalled the pride in the program, where players take pride in wearing that Nebraska uniform now. ... I'm real excited about the chance for them to win their 11th game."



TEXAS

HOUSTON • 6 P.M., ESPN

Baylor (7-5) vs. Illinois (6-6)

→ **SN's pick: Illinois.** Baylor made news by beating Texas in Austin, but there weren't many highlights after that. Illinois had an uneven season, too, dropping three of its last four. Still, the Illini did pick up a couple of signature wins—against Penn State and Northwestern—in a .500 season.

→ **Ken Dilger, former NFL and 1991-94**

Illinois TE, agrees: "Illinois has not done a very good job in the second half of the season stopping the pass. If we can stop QB Robert Griffin, I like the Illini's chances to win."

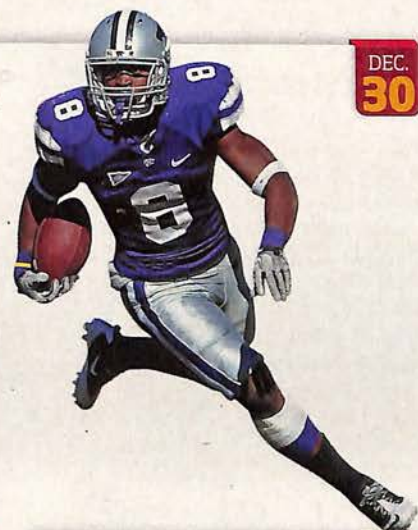
ALAMO

SAN ANTONIO • 9:15 P.M., ESPN

Arizona (7-5) vs. Oklahoma State (10-2)

→ **SN's pick: Oklahoma State.** The Cowboys' high-powered offense will overwhelm Arizona's middling defense. The Wildcats gave up an average of 36 points in their last four games—all losses.

→ **Walt Garrison, former Dallas Cowboys and 1962-65 Oklahoma State FB, agrees:** "They've got a great coach, I love Mike Gundy. He's recruiting some good players. Justin Blackmon is another Dez Bryant. He's a big, fast, stout receiver. And I like the way Kendall Hunter runs."



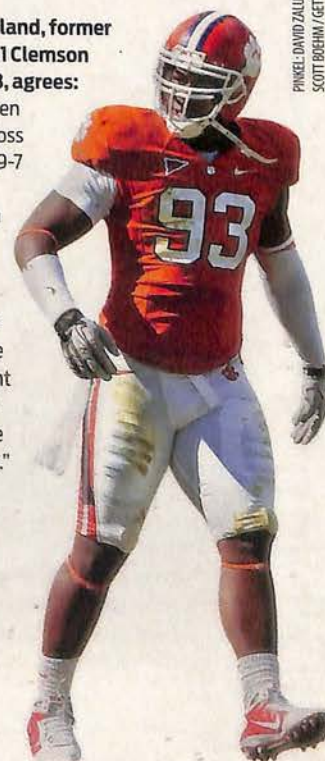
MEINEKE CAR CARE

CHARLOTTE • NOON., ESPN

Clemson (6-6) vs. South Florida (7-5)

→ **SN's pick: Clemson.** With four losses by less than a TD, the Tigers are better than their 6-6 record indicates. Clemson has the ninth-ranked scoring defense in the country, led by Nagurski Trophy winner DE **Da'Quan Bowers**.

→ **Levon Kirkland, former NFL and 1990-91 Clemson All-American LB, agrees:** "Most teams, when they come off a loss like (Clemson's 29-7 defeat against South Carolina in the regular-season finale), want to prove themselves, and that's going to be the case. We want to make sure our recruits see we're making progress."



LIBERTY

MEMPHIS • 3:30 P.M., ESPN

Georgia (6-6) vs. UCF (10-3)

→ **SN's pick:** UCF. The Knights have lost once since falling, 17-13, at K-State in September. A talent edge for Georgia? Sure, especially with a guy like receiver A.J. Green. But UCF coach George O'Leary has built his program on hard-hitting defense, better-than-C-USA speed at the skill positions and legit Florida talent that gets better every year.

→ **Mike Sims-Walker, Jaguars and 2003-06 UCF WR, agrees:** "UCF will win. We're a better team. We have a great defense—I think it's top 10 in the country."

DEC.
31

CHICK-FIL-A

ATLANTA • 7:30 P.M., ESPN

Florida State (9-4) vs. South Carolina (9-4)

→ **SN's pick:** South Carolina. In freshman **Marcus Lattimore**, the Gamecocks have a tailback who is a workhorse and a game-breaker, and coach Steve Spurrier isn't afraid to ride him. The Seminoles have a decent run defense, but they haven't seen a back like Lattimore.

→ **Dunta Robinson, Falcons and 2000-03 South Carolina CB agrees:** "I definitely expect them to beat Florida State, especially coming off the loss to Auburn in the SEC championship game. ... They're playing good football right now; the position that Spurrier has put them in is huge."



DEC.
31

TICKETCITY

DALLAS • NOON, ESPN

Northwestern (7-5) vs. Texas Tech (7-5)

→ **SN's pick:** Texas Tech. What happens when a team that has given up 118 points in its past two games (Northwestern) faces a team that has scored 99 in its past two games (Texas Tech)? Northwestern loses, that's what.

→ **Lawrence Flugence, 2000-04 Texas Tech LB and the school's all-time leading tackler, agrees:** "I'll say 31-28 is going to be the score. I really look forward to watching that defense play—it's really stepped it up since I went there. (FS) Cody Davis is only a sophomore, and he's a heck of a player."

JAN.
1

OUTBACK

TAMPA • 1 P.M., ABC

Florida (7-5) vs. Penn State (7-5)

→ **SN's pick:** Penn State. The Gators can't have much momentum with Urban Meyer coaching his last game. Penn State backup QB **Matt McGloin** closed the season playing well, and the Nittany Lions finished tied for fourth in the Big Ten behind three 11-1 teams.

→ **Paul Petrino, offensive coordinator of the Illinois team that beat Penn State, agrees:** "Penn State has improved offensively with the backup QB. He gave them the ability to throw the ball downfield more, and they run it well, so it makes them hard to defend."



JAN.
1

CAPITAL ONE

ORLANDO • 1 P.M., ESPN

Alabama (9-3) vs. Michigan State (11-1)

→ **SN's pick:** Alabama. The Spartans are ranked 21st in the nation against the run, but they'll still struggle against the Tide's power rushers. Former MSU coach **Nick Saban** will hand the Spartans their program-worst fifth straight bowl loss.

→ **Dennis Homan, former NFL and 1967 All-American Alabama WR, agrees:** "Getting embarrassed by Auburn—after leading 24-0—is incentive enough to finish this year strong against Michigan State. Hopefully, we can end on a good note."



JAN.
1

GATOR

JACKSONVILLE • 1:30 P.M., ESPN2

Michigan (7-5) vs. Mississippi State (8-4)

→ **SN's pick:** Mississippi State. Michigan will be playing to save coach Rich Rodriguez's job, but that won't be enough to overcome shortcomings on both sides of the ball.

→ **Clarence Harmon, former Redskins and 1975-76 Mississippi State RB, agrees:** "Bulldogs by 10. Michigan is one-dimensional with (QB Denard Robinson). Our defense is pretty good. We control the ball and keep the ball away from the other team a lot. We pound on you. (SS) **Charles Mitchell** and (LB) Chris White are hard-nosed players."



JAN.
1

GODADDY.COM

MOBILE, ALA. • 8 P.M., ESPN

Miami (Ohio) (9-4) vs. Middle Tennessee State (6-6)

→ **SN's pick:** Miami. The RedHawks finished 1-11 last season and bounced back to win the MAC title. With a victory in the bowl game, they would set a Division I-A record with a nine-win improvement. Look for the defense to be the key; it has given up 13.6 points per game during the team's current five-game win streak.

→ **Bill Arnsparger, former college and NFL coach and 1948-49 Miami OT, agrees:** "They are confident and have played with that feeling all year. Miami will be prepared."

JAN.
6

COTTON

ARLINGTON, TEXAS • 8 P.M., FOX

LSU (10-2) vs. Texas A&M (9-3)

→ **SN's pick:** LSU. Near the end of the regular season, A&M had five straight wins against bowl-bound teams. LSU is eighth in the nation in total defense—and that gives them the edge. Look out for DT Drake Nevis collapsing the pocket.

→ **Matt Mauck, 2003 LSU BCS title-winning QB, agrees:** "(LSU's) only two losses are to BCS (-bowl) teams, and as talent goes, they're one of, if not the, most talented team in the country. I'm glad I don't have to play against that defense."

JAN.
7

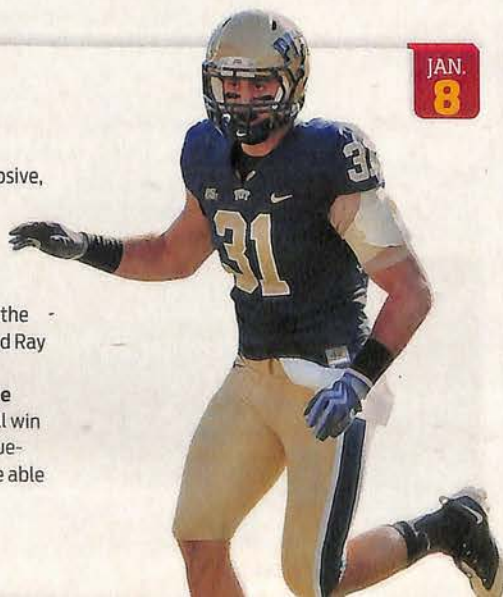
COMPASS

BIRMINGHAM, ALA. • NOON, ESPN

Kentucky (6-6) vs. Pitt (7-5)

→ **SN's pick:** Pitt. UK's offense is explosive, so Pitt's **Dom DeCicco**—a linebacker masquerading as a safety—will seek out early big hits on WR Randall Cobb and anyone else he can find. If the game slows to a grind, the advantage swings to the Panthers, who'll pound RBs Dion Lewis and Ray Graham.

→ **Adam Froman, QB of the Louisville team that lost to both, agrees:** "Pitt will win because of the defensive line. They are blue-collar guys who never quit. They should be able to get pressure on the QB."



JAN.
8

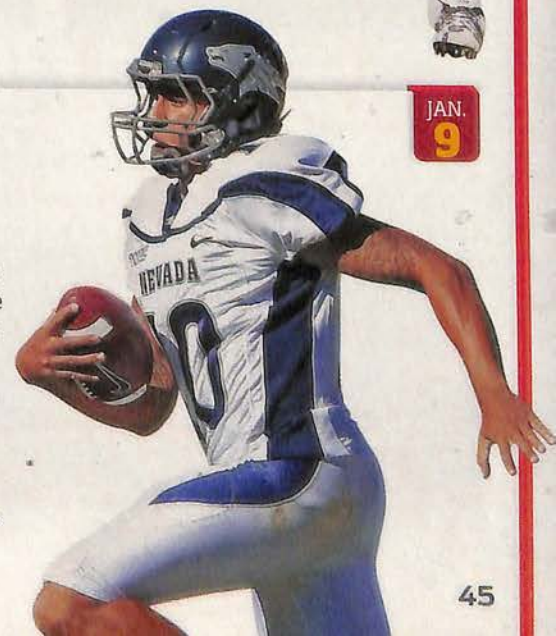
KRAFT FIGHT HUNGER

SAN FRANCISCO • 9 P.M., ESPN

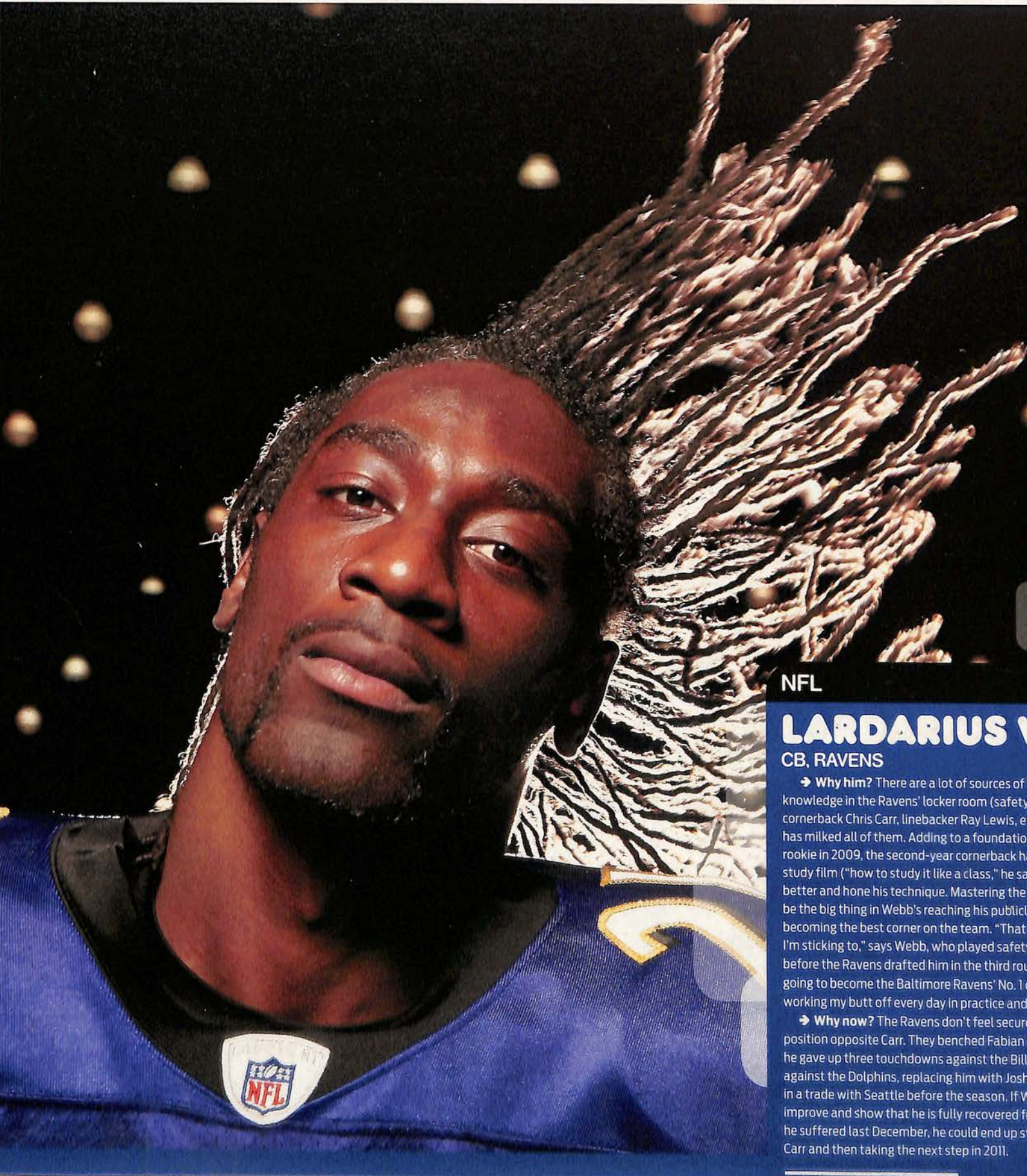
Boston College (7-5) vs. Nevada (12-1)

→ **SN's pick:** Nevada. Boston College has won five straight, holding those opponents to an average of 11.8 points per game. But Nevada is ranked seventh in the nation in scoring offense, and dual-threat QB **Colin Kaepernick** will prove tough to stop.

→ **Derek Kennard, 1981-83 Nevada OL, agrees:** "We run a number of diverse plays that keeps the defense honest. Nevada has so much team speed on both sides of the ball. Coach Chris Ault puts the offense in position to win."



JAN.
9



NFL

LARDARIUS WEBB

CB, RAVENS

➔ **Why him?** There are a lot of sources of football knowledge in the Ravens' locker room (safety Ed Reed, cornerback Chris Carr, linebacker Ray Lewis, et al.), and Webb has milked all of them. Adding to a foundation he laid as a rookie in 2009, the second-year cornerback has learned how to study film ("how to study it like a class," he says), read coverages better and hone his technique. Mastering the little things will be the big thing in Webb's reaching his publicly stated goal of becoming the best corner on the team. "That is a statement I'm sticking to," says Webb, who played safety at Nicholls State before the Ravens drafted him in the third round in 2009. "I'm going to become the Baltimore Ravens' No. 1 cornerback, and I'm working my butt off every day in practice and in the classroom."

➔ **Why now?** The Ravens don't feel secure about the starting position opposite Carr. They benched Fabian Washington after he gave up three touchdowns against the Bills and struggled against the Dolphins, replacing him with Josh Wilson, acquired in a trade with Seattle before the season. If Webb continues to improve and show that he is fully recovered from an ACL injury he suffered last December, he could end up starting across from Carr and then taking the next step in 2011.

Photo by Matt Roth for SN

7 FOR '11

SN'S ANNUAL PREVIEW OF THE COMING YEAR FEATURES A SOON-TO-BE STAR IN EACH ONE OF THE SPORTS WE COVER. DON'T WAIT UNTIL THE CALENDAR TURNS TO MEET THE NEXT BIG THINGS.

STARTING FIVE

The chalk on what you can count on in 2011



1

CHAMPS

Panthers 2-time Pro Bowl OLB **Jon Beason** says the Falcons will win the Super Bowl in February: "The NFC South is the best division in football, and if they can get home-field advantage, they will be a tough out in that dome. Roddy White has made plays all year, and Matt Ryan has played great at home—they have a great chance."



2

CHUMPS

NFL Network analyst **Joe Theismann** says the Titans will struggle next season: "I'd say the Titans because of their quarterback situation, which could definitely be unsettled. I don't think the Titans are going to be the type of team we're used to seeing."



3

CHECKBOOKS

Fletcher Smith, agent for Donovan McNabb, says a work stoppage would hurt everyone involved: "The owners are going to take a hit, and so will players. But that's billionaires who own the teams, fighting with some players who are millionaires over multimillions of dollars. The people I feel most for are the fans. I can't purely speak from a fan's perspective, but these are tough economic times. Some fans are worried about college tuitions and other things, but they make the sacrifice to buy season tickets because they love the game. I think it's hard for those fans to deal with the concept of a work stoppage."



4

CHALLENGES

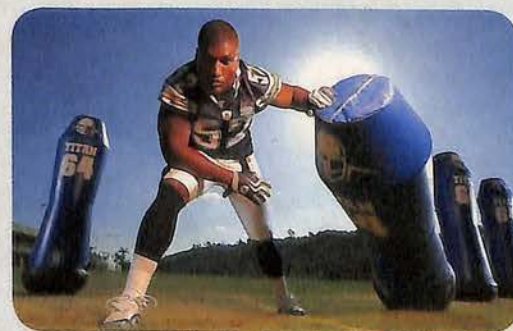
Cowboys four-time Pro Bowl OLB **DeMarcus Ware** says that for Dallas, rebounding from a disappointing season won't require drastic measures: "We don't have to do a lot other than keep this attitude and mindset that we've had the (past few) games. We have to play hard, practice hard and have fun. When you have fun and keep things upbeat, you play better. We're not trying to do too much; we're trusting each other, and we're trying to prepare as hard as we can every day to play good."



5

CHANGES

Former NFL VP of officiating **Mike Pereira** says the rule on determining what a catch is could be rewritten: "The competition committee will take a harder look at determining when a catch is completed as you're going to the ground. Maybe make it a little simpler. ... I've said the Calvin Johnson play (in Week 1) was an incomplete pass, but the eye test made it seem like it should've been a touchdown. I think almost everybody thought it should've been a touchdown. If almost everybody feels that it should've been a touchdown, then it's logical that the league should look at it."



A YEAR AGO, CHARGERS OLB LARRY ENGLISH SURE LOOKED GOOD TO US

➔ **The year that was:** The Chargers' plan has been to groom English, the 16th overall pick in the 2009 draft, as Shawne Merriman's replacement. But that plan has been slow in developing. Not only has English had to make the transition from a 4-3 end in college to a 3-4 outside linebacker in the NFL, his progress has been set back by injuries, including a foot problem that required surgery and cost him six games this season.

➔ **Was 2010 everything you hoped it would be, Larry?** "It has been some ups and downs, some bumps in the road. But it's all about how you respond to it. It ain't just how you start. It's how you finish."

— Kevin Acee, Clifton Brown, Dennis Dillon, Darin Gantt

STARTING FIVE

The chalk on what you can count on in 2011



1

CHAMPS

Lane Kiffin, whose USC team gave up 53 points to Oregon at home in October, says the Ducks will be the favorites next season: "They play at a different speed than everyone else. It's unreal. They've got guys that can run all over the place—on both sides of the ball. The quarterback will be back next year, the running backs, the defense is young. I don't see a weakness right now. They've got it going, and no one has figured out how to stop them yet. It's going to take a pretty unique team to beat them."



2

CHUMPS

ESPN analyst **Mark May** says Cam Newton will head to the NFL—and Auburn will head south: "I don't think people realize the special talent that Cameron Newton is. Without him on that team this year, how many games does Auburn really win? Especially with a defense that had trouble stopping anyone. If (Newton) doesn't stay for his senior season—and I don't see why he would—you're talking about replacing not only the most important part of the offense but a once in a lifetime-type player. The fall is inevitable."



3

CHECKBOOKS

Texas athletic director **DeLoss Dodds** says the new Longhorn Network—all Texas, all the time, no shared revenue with any other Big 12 team—will be more than just a financial boon for the school: "It's at the front of everything we're doing right now. It will be ready to go fall of 2011. Obviously, it will be important financially for us. But it will do so much more. Years down the road when the (Big 12) television package is up, we'll have leverage because we'll have our own network. We don't know where (television dollars) are going, but we'll have our own network and that gives us leverage."



4

CHALLENGES

Notre Dame coach **Brian Kelly** says quarterback Dayne Crist will have his work cut out for him in recovering from a second knee injury but that he'll pick up where he left off—and then some: "Another knee injury is tough enough, but not being able to complete a full season is so important—if for nothing else, playing experience and seeing and reacting to different things defenses show on a weekly basis. Dayne was comfortable with what we want to do and was executing it. And now he has another obstacle to overcome, another knee injury. I'm confident he can return next year to where he was when he was injured and then go well beyond that."



5

CHANGES

As the BCS enters the last year of a four-year evaluation process, Mountain West commissioner **Craig Thompson** says his league, which is losing Utah and BYU to conference realignment but adding Boise State, will still be looked at for an automatic BCS bid: "We've had changes, changes we believe will strengthen our conference. Ultimately, getting (an automatic BCS bid) is about winning and winning consistently. We've positioned ourselves to make that next step, and we believe we're on the verge of doing so with the strength of our members."



A YEAR AGO, FLORIDA QB JOHN BRANTLEY SURE LOOKED GOOD TO US

➔ **The year that was:** Brantley, a pure pocket passer, wasn't the right fit for Florida coach Urban Meyer's spread option, run-oriented scheme, no matter how hard the Gators tried. It was such a poor fit, Brantley lost confidence in the one thing he could always count on: his big, accurate right arm. He finished the regular season with 2,020 passing yards, nine TDs and nine interceptions, and the Gators went 7-5.

➔ **Was 2010 everything you thought it would be, John?** "I don't think it was what any of us thought it would be. We've battled as a team. We've done everything possible to make it work. It's not a lack of effort, that's for sure. Anyone wants to personally have success, but that's not what the game is about. It's about team success, and we didn't reach the goals we set for ourselves, so that's disappointing."

— Matt Hayes



COLLEGE FOOTBALL

NICK MONTANA

QB, WASHINGTON

➔ **Why him?** Not once did Joe Montana try to steer his son Nick to his alma mater, Notre Dame. Really, not once. The guy who may be bigger than Rockne himself in South Bend told his son to trust his heart. So Nick, who was among the best pro-style quarterback prospects in the 2010 recruiting class, went with the coach he thought could get him ready for the NFL better than any other—and became Washington coach Steve Sarkisian's first signature recruit. "He has coached a lot of guys that now play in the NFL," Nick Montana says. "But right now, I'm excited about being part of building something here, of helping to change things here. I can't wait until my time comes."

➔ **Why now?** After five years of what could be—and maybe not enough of what was—Jake Locker is gone from Washington. The starting quarterback job will be wide-open in 2011, and Montana—who enrolled early, then redshirted in 2010—will battle current top backup Keith Price, who will be a sophomore, for the job.

Photo by Jay Drowns / SN

BASEBALL

DOMONIC BROWN
OF, PHILLIES

➔ **Why him?** Although the term "five-tool talent" is overused, there is no better description for the 23-year-old Brown, a 6-5, 200-pound slugger. Tool No. 1 is a lefthanded swing expected to produce 30-homer seasons, as Brown displayed with a monster shot off Tigers ace Justin Verlander last spring training. "When I stepped in, I was like, *Wow, this is Justin Verlander*," Brown says. "After the first pitch, I was locked in. That gave me a lot of confidence." Add a desire to succeed to his toolbox. "I set my goals really high, and if I don't make the team this spring, I will be disappointed," he says.

➔ **Why now?** Philadelphia's veteran lineup, one of the deepest in the game, has a void after the free-agent departure of right fielder Jayson Werth. The Phillies insist Brown won't be handed the job, but they know he has the skills to win it in spring training.

Photo by Steve Boyle for SN

STARTING FIVE

The chalk on what you can count on in 2011



1

CHAMPS

Rangers OF **David Murphy** says the Giants will enter the season as the favorites to become the first repeat World Series champions since the 1999-2000 Yankees: "I have to give them the upper hand simply because they are the reigning world champs and because they obviously have the type of pitching that wins championships."



2

CHUMPS

MLB Network analyst **Bill Ripken** says the Rays will stumble: "Losing Carl Crawford, Carlos Pena and (potentially) Rafael Soriano will be tough to overcome. A big reason Tampa Bay will struggle is because the A.L. East is getting better. Toronto is moving in the right direction with John Farrell, Buck Showalter has Baltimore turning the corner, Boston will be healthier, and the Yankees aren't going anywhere.... The Rays have to reload and develop some of their young talent before they head back to the postseason."



3

CHECKBOOKS

MLB executive vice president for labor relations **Rob Manfred** says he is hopeful management and players will be able to negotiate a new collective bargaining agreement before the old one expires on December 11, 2011: "While it's too early in the preparation to have a good feel for what the key topics are going to be, I'm a huge believer in this process. If done correctly, it can lead to positive agreements. I'm optimistic that will happen."



4

CHALLENGES

New Braves manager **Fredi Gonzalez** says Atlanta won't lower its expectations just because Bobby Cox is gone: "I never use the word *replace*. For me, it's just taking over the helm. I'm going to be the next guy in line and hopefully keep putting those pennants up in left field. Bobby still is going to be around. I want him around. He has influenced a lot of my baseball background, but you still have to be you. People in Atlanta expect contenders and winners, and I don't see that changing."



5

CHANGES

Rangers SP **C.J. Wilson** says starting the regular season three days earlier is a small change but it will mean a lot to players: "I'm excited that the season is getting pushed forward. The earlier the season starts, the better for the majority of teams. A few days at the end of the season might not seem like much, but it gives us the best chance to avoid negative weather consequences during the playoffs as well."



A YEAR AGO, BRAVES RF JASON HEYWARD SURE LOOKED GOOD TO US

➔ **The year that was:** Heyward wowed all of baseball with his sweet lefthanded swing in spring training, made the Braves' opening day lineup as a 20-year-old and led the club with a .393 on-base percentage. Heyward, whom outgoing manager Bobby Cox has compared to Hank Aaron, finished in the top five among all rookies in runs (83), hits (144), homers (18) and RBIs (72).

➔ **Was 2010 everything you thought it would be, Jason?** "I had the time of my life. I can look back and say I worked as hard as I could work to get here, and I enjoyed it. I know this is my first season in major league baseball, but I'd have to say this is the best group of people I've been around."

— Ryan Fagan, Stan McNeal

STARTING FIVE

The chalk on what you can count on in 2011



1

CHAMPS

Celtics SF **Paul Pierce** says the Lakers will be the favorites to win a third straight title: "The Lakers are still the defending champs, and they're the champs until someone proves otherwise. We obviously felt we were right there and we just needed to hold on and we could have won (Game 7 of The Finals). We feel we are good enough to get back there and win. But the Lakers won, so they have to be the favorite."



2

CHUMPS

TNT analyst **Charles Barkley** says the Suns are due for a fall: "They signed three guys who are basically the same player that live and die with 3s (Josh Childress, Hakim Warrick and Hedo Turkoglu). Steve Nash is getting older—he can't cover them like he's been doing. Just like Brett Favre is finding out, Father Time is undefeated, and at some point Steve Nash is going to start wearing down."



3

CHECKBOOKS

Nets C **Brook Lopez** says new Russian billionaire owner Mikhail Prokhorov will provide the team with the resources it needs to be a contender: "I think it is going to be good for us and for the franchise. Already, you can get the sense that things are changing. We have new players, a bunch of new players. We have a new coach. We have a new arena that is coming up soon. Every time there is a big player available, we are getting involved. He wants us to be a contender, and that is good to know that he is behind us."



4

CHALLENGES

Rockets coach **Rick Adelman** says getting oft-injured center Yao Ming back full time won't be easy: "It's a work in progress. It is not an easy situation, obviously. We are trying to make progress, but we're still figuring out how to play with him being in there and how to play without him. We have to keep in mind the young man's career and we want him to come back and be 100 percent. But at the same time, it is a difficult thing for our team."



5

CHANGES

Commissioner **David Stern** says the league isn't on the verge of contraction, but there will have to be changes to the collective bargaining agreement—which expires next summer—to keep it that way: "I would say the league is viable as long as you have owners who want to continue funding losses. But it's not, in the long term, a sustainable business model that we're happy to be supporting. So the viability will come from filling the arenas and good games on television and increased mobile and broadband and digital aspects of our game. But the agreement with the players needs to be reset."



A YEAR AGO, BUCKS G BRANDON JENNINGS SURE LOOKED GOOD TO US

➔ **The year that was:** Jennings had some dazzling moments as a rookie, including a 55-point game against the Warriors, and he finished the season with averages of 15.5 points and 5.7 assists. He was third in the rookie of the year voting behind fellow point guards Tyreke Evans and Stephen Curry, but Jennings was the only one of the three to lead his team to the playoffs.

➔ **Was 2010 everything you hoped it would be, Brandon?** "The past year has been what I expected, but it has been better than I expected, too. I learned a lot, but I know there is a lot to improve. We got some playoff experience. We got on a good run. Now we have to find a way build on that and get better."

— Sean Deveney



NBA

DEMARCUS COUSINS

C, KINGS

→ **Why him?** Cousins entered the draft as one of the most talented offensive big men to hit the league in years, having averaged 15.1 points and 9.8 rebounds in one season at Kentucky, but he slipped to No. 5 because of questions about his work ethic and attitude. "It has been a new transition—the players are bigger and better," Cousins says. "It is like going from high school to college in that way, except it's even more now because these are the best players in the world."

→ **Why now?** Already, some attitude issues have cropped up—Cousins has reportedly been fined by the team for arguments with the coaching staff and was kicked out of a late-November practice—but the Kings have been nudging Cousins in the right direction and he is averaging 11.0 points and 6.8 rebounds. Coach Paul Westphal prefers to label Cousins' outlook as "emotional." Once he matures a bit, Cousins will be the most promising young big man in the NBA.

Photo by Jay Drowns / SN



COLLEGE BASKETBALL

JARED SULLINGER F, OHIO STATE

➔ **Why him?** When Sullinger committed to Ohio State as a high school freshman, he had big shoulders and a great feel for playing around the basket, but he was only 6-6 and a bit pudgy. Then, he grew. As he grew, eventually to 6-9, and his taste for hard work deepened, his weight evened out and he turned into the best inside prospect in the 2010 recruiting class. "My hope is to win," Sullinger says. "When it comes to personal goals, I really don't set them high for me. I'm all about team. Honestly, I don't think about the endgame. For you to get to the endgame, you have to win the games in front of you now. Once you start living in the future, your present is no longer the present."

➔ **Why now?** There may be nothing more uncommon in college basketball than the mighty inside scorer, but there generally seems to be a low-post monster around when an NCAA championship is won: Tyler Hansbrough, Al Horford, Sean May. Sullinger may be the best combination of power, athleticism and skill in this spot since Michigan's Chris Webber nearly two decades ago, and he joins a veteran Ohio State team lacking exactly what he delivers.

Photo by Bob Leverone / SN

STARTING FIVE

The chalk on what you can count on in 2011



1

CHAMPS

Arizona coach **Sean Miller** says Duke will be the team to beat in April: "I think they have the best chance to be a No. 1 seed, and when they're a No. 1 seed, getting to the Sweet 16 is something they do better than anybody. When you get to the Sweet 16 and you're comfortable and you're talented and you've been there before, it's a huge advantage."



2

CHUMPS

ESPN analyst **Fran Fraschilla** says that for the second consecutive year, the Pac-10, which wound up with only two NCAA Tournament bids in 2010, will struggle: "We're not picking on you, Pac-10, but facts are facts. A (No. 10) conference RPI rating early in the season speaks for itself. There is only one McDonald's All American freshman in the league this year: Josh Smith at UCLA. Until recruiting picks up, the league will remain mired in mediocrity."



3

CHECKBOOKS

TCU athletic director **Chris Del Conte**, whose program is headed for the Big East Conference in 2012, says the Horned Frogs will become competitive in the nation's deepest basketball league, but it will take time—and more resources: "I think we have a great coach. Jimmy Christian has done a good job. I think you can always handle yourself elsewhere. A rising tide floats boats. If you perceive yourself to be more than you are, you'll get there. Managing expectations is probably the toughest part of the athletic director job because everybody wants us to be instantly successful. My job is to look at the top 25 or 50 schools in the country and see what tools they have and provide us with those tools."



4

CHALLENGES

New Iowa State coach **Fred Hoiberg**, who in his first coaching job is rebuilding a program that left him almost no talent, says he will get the Cyclones on the right track: "With all the players that had left the program, we had to make an immediate impact. I thought we really did a good job of doing that with a few transfer players. Then we really hit the recruiting trail. It really is my dream job. When my number was retired, I spoke in front of the crowd—I expressed that my dream is to one day come back and coach my kid at Iowa State University."



5

CHANGES

Ohio State coach **Thad Matta** says that in collective bargaining agreement negotiations between the NBA and its players association, increasing the league's age minimum from 19 to 20 will be tricky: "I don't know if I know what the answer is. I wish I could say, 'This is exactly what they need to do.' I'd like to see the two-year rule. I think it does help the NBA, and it does help the kid whether they know it or not. I don't know if they can do it."



A YEAR AGO, TEXAS G AVERY BRADLEY SURE LOOKED GOOD TO US

➔ **The year that was:** It didn't turn out entirely as planned. Bradley joined a Texas team that seemed likely to benefit from his athleticism and attitude, but the Longhorns' chemistry combusted as players' attention turned toward their NBA draft futures. Bradley wound up averaging 11.6 points and, after a first-round loss in the NCAA Tournament, filed for early entry. In June, he was selected No. 19 overall by the Celtics, and, after missing all of training camp and part of the season because of offseason ankle surgery, he has played in five games.

➔ **Was 2010 everything you thought it would be, Avery?** "You know, it's been good. I have had the injury, and it is getting better. But I am in a situation now where you have great players all around and you have a team that could be playing for a championship. So I know my job is to just come in and work hard and wait for my opportunity and just learn from all the guys around me."

— Mike DeCourcy

STARTING FIVE

The chalk on what you can count on in 2011



1

CHAMPS

Flames RW **Jarome Iginla** says if his team doesn't win the Cup, the offense-first Capitals will, and a perceived lack of defense won't stand in the way: "They have a very talented team, and they'll learn. I think a lot of defense can be taught. You can't teach the skill side as much; you can't teach the natural ability as much. You can teach defense, and I think they'll make some adjustments to keep learning. They want to win—they're obviously a very young and hungry team."



2

CHUMPS

NBC analyst and former NHL goalie **Darren Pang** says the Devils, who have been disappointing so far this season, won't turn things around: "The one issue New Jersey has is the lack of depth on the blue line. If you're a team that built your foundation on team defense but you're thin in that area and there's no difference-maker back there and you've given up a lot of assets in the trade for (Ilya) Kovalchuk and the injury to Zach Parise—I think it's really fair to say that the upside doesn't look great for New Jersey. I personally don't see them bouncing back."



3

CHECKBOOKS

Former NHLPA executive director **Paul Kelly** says the union and the league will start ramping up posturing in preparation for negotiating the collective bargaining agreement, which will expire after the 2011-12 season: "Both sides are starting to poll their constituents, put their own perspectives and outline the issues together. That's going to take several months. I know the league is going to go around team by team, talking to owners and G.M.s, and that's going to take time."



4

CHALLENGES

After a disappointing 2010 for his Russian Olympic team and for the Capitals, **Alex Ovechkin** says he won't feel the same pressure this season: "Right now, you don't feel the pressure. I think the problem (last year) was we feel some pressure because everyone is predicting Cup, everyone thinks we're going to beat everyone and be in the finals. This kind of pressure—we don't want it this year."



5

CHANGES

NHL COO **John Collins**, who is leading negotiations for the league's U.S. television contracts, which expire after this season, says the league will be in good position to expand its TV presence: "TV is still the most important marketing platform for any league. For us, we have really good partners as it relates to the U.S. The (pending) NBC and Comcast merger obviously is a big story. We'll see how it shakes out. We'll sit down with them first and see what their vision is. We have a bunch of ideas, too, in terms of how to grow the sport and grow the business, and we'll go from there."



A YEAR AGO, WINDSOR SPITFIRES LW TAYLOR HALL SURE LOOKED GOOD TO US

➔ **The year that was:** Hall didn't leave anything on the ice as he ended his amateur career with the Windsor Spitfires of the OHL. He won the Memorial Cup. Again. He was named playoff MVP. Again.

Then he ended the Taylor vs. Tyler debate when the Oilers took him No. 1 overall in the June draft, ahead of Tyler Seguin. Hall made his NHL debut this season, scoring his first NHL goal against the Blue Jackets.

➔ **Was 2010 everything you thought it would be, Taylor?** "2010 was definitely a good year. Winning the Memorial Cup—that was awesome. Playing (in Edmonton) has been everything I expected. It's been a great experience to play here, and I'm having a lot of fun. ... (The Memorial Cup and draft) are both things that not a lot of people get to experience. I'm very fortunate."

—Craig Custance



NHL.

JONATHAN BERNIER

G, KINGS

➔ **Why him?** Last spring, Bernier gave the league a taste of just how talented he is when he won each of his three NHL starts, including his first career shutout. He was so impressive that some fans were calling for him to start in the playoffs even though Jonathan Quick had carried the load all season. "It was big for me," Bernier says. "It wasn't just for this year. It was just for proving that I was ready to play." Since the Kings took him with the 11th pick in the 2006 draft, he has been tabbed the team's goalie of the future. He has won in junior hockey. He has won in the AHL. Now, at 22, he's ready to win in the NHL.

➔ **Why now?** Bernier is too talented to remain in Quick's shadow much longer. "The big challenge this year is we never know with trades and injuries and stuff like that," Bernier says. "You have to accept your role but at the same time not be satisfied." That hunger will drive him to be a starter soon. Even if it's not in L.A.

Photo by Jay Drowns / SN



NASCAR

AJ ALLMENDINGER NO. 43 RICHARD PETTY MOTORSPORTS FORD

➔ **Why him?** Over the past four years, Allmendinger's comfort level with stock cars—he grew up in the open-wheel ranks—has grown exponentially, and now that he has solid sponsorship and RPM is under Richard Petty's control, 2011 should be a big year for him. "I think it's just being able to be confident and to show up every week and be competitive," Allmendinger, 29, says. "We've been building on that every weekend. (Crew chief) Mike Shiplett and I have had a full year to work together now, and he understands what I want. It really just comes with experience. The more I run up front, the more confident I get. There are still a lot of things I need to learn. I feel like I can contend inside the top 10 every week."

➔ **Why now?** Despite the turmoil surrounding the recent contraction and restructuring at Richard Petty Motorsports, Allmendinger kept his focus. He posted six top 12 finishes in the final 11 races of the season, including a fifth-place run at Homestead.

Photo by Albert Dickson / SN Illustration by Steve Romer / SN

STARTING FIVE

The chalk on what you can count on in 2011



1

CHAMPS

ESPN analyst and 1999 Cup champion **Dale Jarrett** says **Carl Edwards** will be the guy to dethrone **Jimmie Johnson** in 2011: "What I've seen with Roush Fenway—they've made a big resurgence here, and Carl Edwards is as talented as anybody out there—I look for him to be back next year more like 2008, when he won nine races and finished second in the championship. That's the Carl Edwards I expect to see next year."



2

CHUMPS

ESPN analyst and three-time Cup champion crew chief **Ray Evernham** says any driver struggles next season will have to be from outside this year's top three: "I think the guys that will happen to are the guys that haven't contended. I think your top three guys will be strong next year because they're on the upswing. The guys that were on the outside (of title contention) are the guys that I would look at."



3

CHECKBOOKS

Car owner **Rick Hendrick** says 2011 will mark a turning point for the sluggish economy: "It was awful quiet with the economy being soft, from new sponsors and sponsors wanting to re-up or even new people coming in, and that activity has gotten a lot stronger. We've had more movement, more action with companies—some new companies and the old companies that were there that are re-upping. The economy is not fixed yet, but I can definitely feel a difference."



4

CHALLENGES

Dale Earnhardt Jr. says track owners will get creative to recoup fans who have drifted away: "Fan attendance and fan enjoyment has always been the responsibility of the track promoter and, of course, NASCAR executives. I trust those people, and I trust their ideas. They'll get more creative, there will be new ideas that will pop in, and it may change the face of the sport. We're just trying to rebuild a little bit of the fan base that we've lost, and I think we will."



5

CHANGES

Despite a Chase race that came down to the final laps at Homestead, **NASCAR chairman and CEO Brian France** will consider tinkering with the playoff format: "Almost every sports league, almost everyone, including the NCAA Tournament last year, is looking around at what they need to do to change their formats a little or a lot, depending on who they are, to make sure that their playoffs or their championship runs are what they want them to be. And we are no different."



A YEAR AGO, BRAD KESELOWSKI SURE LOOKED GOOD TO US

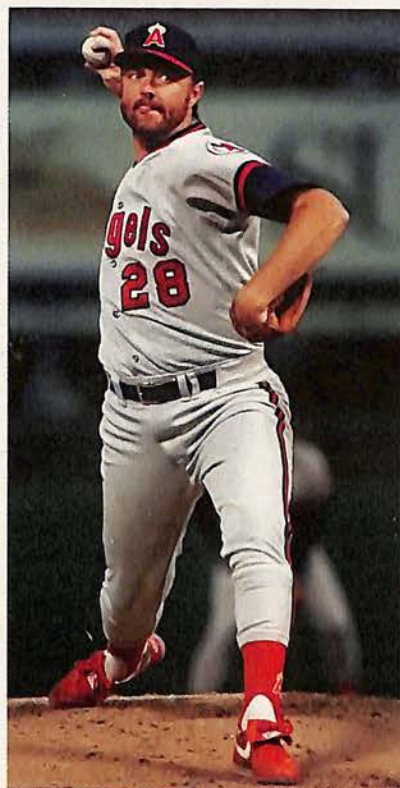
➤ **The year that was:** True enough, Keselowski won the Nationwide Series championship in 2010, but on the Cup side, he struggled. He received plenty of headlines for his feud with Carl Edwards but wound up finishing 25th in the points standings. Part of the problem was the handling of the Penske Racing cars, which deteriorated as the season progressed.

➤ **Was 2010 everything you thought it would be, Brad?** "The reality of it is that we just don't have fast enough cars. We have to go to work. I certainly can do a better job of driving 'em. But at the end of the day, you have to have raw speed first. It's the lifeblood; it's the base of the sport. When you look at the success of the 48 team, the majority of it comes from having raw speed and then executing with it."

—Reid Spencer

The Hall call: A long-timer and a second-timer are knocking on Cooperstown's door

Righthander Bert Blyleven and second baseman Roberto Alomar came excruciatingly close to joining Andre Dawson in the Hall of Fame class of 2010. Needing 405 votes, Blyleven received 400 and Alomar 397. Will 2011—results of the Baseball Writers' Association of America vote will be announced January 5—be their time? Two of their former managers believe it should be.



BERT BLYLEVEN'S RESUME

- 287 wins
- 3.31 ERA
- 3,701 strikeouts (fifth all time)

Why Blyleven should get in

By Tom Kelly, Blyleven's teammate (1975) and manager (1986-88) with the Twins



They throw so many numbers out there. He was only a two-time All-Star. He wasn't this or that. I can tell you he was one of those players who raised the game when he was on the field. You wanted to be out there with him. It's hard to describe, but players and managers understand. When he was pitching, the enthusiasm of the fans was different. He oozed competitiveness. Pitching was in the man's blood. He kept going and going and going, as long as his arm would stay somewhat in one piece. When he took the ball, he was going seven, eight or nine innings and he was getting the job done. He had the fastball and the curveball and was a hit-me-if-you-can guy. He challenged hitters. He was a No. 1-type pitcher for a long time. That stuff is hard to argue with.

— As told to Stan McNeal



ROBERTO ALOMAR'S RESUME

- 12-time All-Star
- 10 Gold Gloves
- .300 batting average

Why Alomar should get in

By Jack McKeon, Alomar's first major league manager with the Padres (1988-90)



He was the best second baseman I ever had, and he had the greatest instincts of any player I've seen. You could see the ability right away. It was just a matter of letting him play and getting the carelessness out of the way, which he did. The Padres let me go after his third season, but I remember hearing rumors that they were trading him. I thought, No way. I'm driving home to where I lived in San Diego and a bulletin comes over. The deal was finalized. I almost drove off the road. He was right there with Tony Gwynn as the most popular player in San Diego. He was 22 years old. How the hell could you trade him? People come up and tell me that I traded him. I say no, no, no. I never would have traded Robbie Alomar.

— As told to Stan McNeal

The offseason's theme: If you've got it, spend it

Baseball's offseason picture came into focus during the winter meetings. Three things we learned:

1. THERE'S A SECONDEVIL EMPIRE IN THE A.L. EAST

For the Yankees to overpay Derek Jeter was expected. For them to control the conversation surrounding Cliff Lee, the biggest free agent of the offseason, was business as usual. For the Red Sox to trade for slick-fielding first baseman Adrian Gonzalez was no surprise, either. But the signing of left fielder Carl Crawford for seven years, \$142 million expanded the borders of the "Evil Empire"—as Red Sox CEO Larry



Carl Crawford

Lucchino once dubbed the Yankees—to include Red Sox Nation. Adding the two players will cost Boston about \$300 million. "They have revenue streams that other clubs don't have," says Angels G.M. Tony Reagins, who was outbid on Crawford. "You can't fault them for that."

This means life just got even tougher for the defending A.L. East champion Rays. Not only did they lose their franchise player to a division rival, they are slashing what had been a \$70 million payroll. "We relish the fact that we have to swim against the tide," G.M. Andrew Friedman says. "It's just that the current is getting stronger."

2. THE NATIONALS CAN PLAY—AT LEAST IN DECEMBER

Since spring training, scouts, executives and agents have said Crawford is far superior to Jayson Werth. Crawford is two years younger, faster, more productive and regarded as a better teammate. By the time their contracts were signed, however, those differences weren't glaring. Washington stunned the baseball world by giving Werth a seven-year, \$126 million deal—not bad for a 31-year-old with

120 career homers and a .272 batting average. With six last-place finishes in the past seven years, the Nationals aren't apologizing. "Sometimes your ownership group is trying to get players and the players don't take the money," manager Jim Riggleman says. "In this case, it's very encouraging."

3. HAVING PURE POWER PAYS

As homer totals fall, the value of sluggers rises. Adam Dunn signed a four-year, \$56 million deal with the White Sox after making \$20 million over the past two seasons. Carlos Pena got a \$10 million contract from the Cubs after hitting .196—with 28 homers. Aubrey Huff went from one year, \$3 million to two years, \$22 million after leading the World Series champion Giants with 26 homers. "New value," agent Scott Boras calls it. "The metrics of the game are different than five years ago," he says. "General managers are looking for things in the past that there was a plentiful supply of. Now there is a lot less reliability in the ability to have an .800 OPS. When you boil the numbers down, for me, the realization of that really hit this winter."

— Stan McNeal

Not all playoff teams were created equal



Troy Aikman

Twelve teams make the playoffs every year, but only about half are legitimate Super Bowl contenders. With the regular season in the home stretch, here is a look at the six teams I like the most:

1. STEELERS. It starts with the defense. Whenever we hear the term *playmakers*, it seems we immediately think of quarterbacks, running backs and wide receivers. But the Steelers' defense is loaded with playmakers—from nose tackle Casey Hampton to linebackers James Harrison and LaMarr Woodley to safety Troy Polamalu—and we've seen them come up big time after time. There aren't many teams that can take over games with defense.

And let's not overlook the offense. Ben Roethlisberger has won two Super Bowls, and if he can get healthy he'll be even more dangerous in the postseason. He has several targets, including Mike Wallace, one of the fastest players in the league, and Rashard Mendenhall makes the Steelers' running game potent.

2. RAVENS. This team has been knocking at the door the last couple of years. Like the Steelers, Baltimore thrives on defense. You have to be aware of Terrell Suggs at all times, Ray Lewis still is playing at a top level, and the return of safety Ed Reed has bolstered the secondary and raised the team's takeaways. Joe Flacco has a fair amount of playoff experience

The Ravens and Steelers are defined by defense, but Flacco (left) and Roethlisberger will play key roles in whether their teams have playoff success.



(five games, three wins) for a quarterback in only his third season, so the postseason stage won't be too big for him.

3. PATRIOTS. The tandem of coach Bill Belichick and quarterback Tom Brady will be a formidable one to overcome. With those two engineering the drive, the Patriots have gone to four Super Bowls and won three. A big game? It's just another day at the office for Belichick and Brady. New England has a lot of young players and its defense isn't as striking as Pittsburgh's or Baltimore's, but no one plays better as a complete team than the Patriots.

4. FALCONS. I like quarterback Matt Ryan a lot. And he has a good cast of playmakers, including wide receiver Roddy White, tight end Tony Gonzalez and running back Michael Turner. Right now, Atlanta has the home-field advantage in the NFC. The Falcons are 18-1 at the Georgia Dome the last three years, so being home in the playoffs would be huge. Two years ago, the Falcons went to the playoffs and lost a wild-card game at Arizona. I see Ryan getting his first playoff victory this year, especially if he's playing at home.

5. SAINTS. They've engendered as little fanfare as I can remember for a defending champion that is playing well. Sean Payton says he likes it that way, but that's hard to believe for a coach who has cultivated a fan base that includes Jimmy Buffett and Kenny Chesney. New Orleans might have started slowly and quietly this season, but it is coming on strong and will be a big challenge in postseason. With Drew Brees, a posse of playmakers and a top 10 defense, the Saints can win in the playoffs—even as a wild-card team.

6. PACKERS. Outside linebacker Clay Matthews is a game-changer. Aaron Rodgers, if he can stay healthy, is one of the best quarterbacks in the league. The only thing keeping him from being mentioned in the same class as Brady, Brees and Peyton Manning is his playoff inexperience.

Troy Aikman, a Pro Football Hall of Fame quarterback, is a regular contributor to Sporting News.

Scouts' Views: Playoff Kryptonite

As Troy Aikman's contenders work toward a Super Bowl finish, an NFL scout identifies the weakness that could keep each team from reaching its goal:

● **Steelers.** "They don't seem to be as disciplined and consistent as you would expect. Injuries have hurt their offensive line play, and

they can rack up penalties."

● **Ravens.** "They rely a lot on older defensive guys, Ray Lewis and Ed Reed, to make big plays, so they need some younger players to come through."

● **Patriots.** "Although their defense has improved, their young secondary is still better equipped to play the run, especially at

safety. They are vulnerable to big passing teams."

● **Falcons.** "The key to their pass defense is getting pressure with John Abraham and others. If their smaller corners have to cover for long, they can be burned by the deep passing game."

● **Saints.** "They're like the Falcons—when their aggressive

defense is bringing the pressure, it allows their DBs to make plays. If the QB has time, he can exploit their single coverage."

● **Packers.** "They stick with their strength as a pass-heavy team, but often they don't take advantage of the favorable opportunities that creates to run the ball."

—Vinnie Iyer

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NOTHING BEATS
WRANGLER
COMFORT

These old guys are in it to win it

Meet three future Hall of Famers who have never reached the Super Bowl: Falcons tight end **Tony Gonzalez** (34), Ravens safety **Ed Reed** (32) and Jets linebacker **Jason Taylor** (36). All three have a chance to win a Super Bowl ring in February, and, as they told *Sporting News'* Clifton Brown, at this stage of their careers, chasing a title is an obsession.

SN: Would it be hard for you to play for a noncontending team at this stage of your career?

GONZALEZ: I really have nothing else left to play for. I don't need 100 catches. I'd like to go to the Pro Bowl, but if I don't, I'm not going to cry. Trying to get that ring is the main goal.

REED: Individual accolades just don't mean as much. It's all about the team's success. A lot of great players who have come before me, and many who will come after me, have never won the Super Bowl. It's always been a goal, and it's always going to be a goal until I do it.

TAYLOR: It would be extremely hard. Everybody wants to win. But for some guys early on, it's about the money and getting established as a star, not so much the winning. For me, it's always been about trying to win a Super Bowl. And as you get older, you realize your chances are running out.

SN: Before this season, what was your best chance to win a Super Bowl?

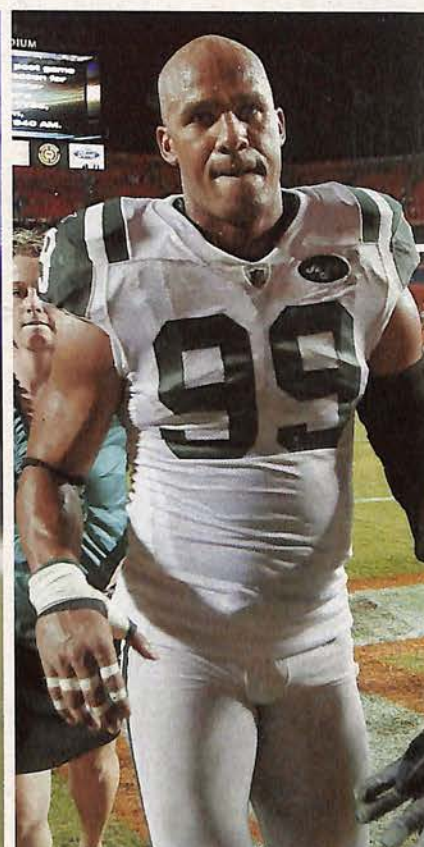
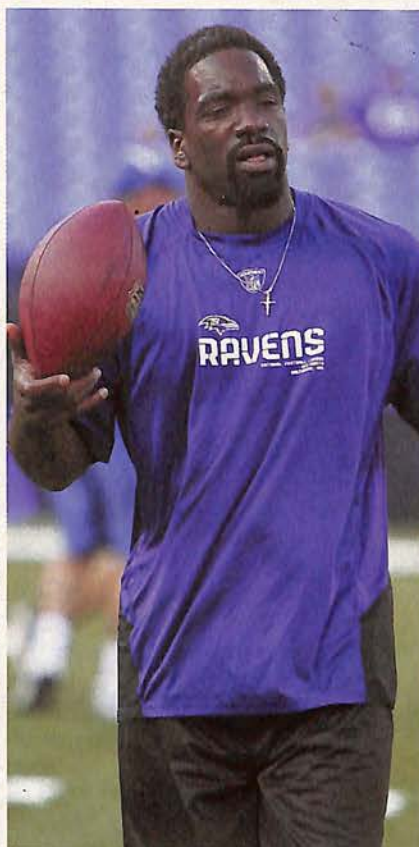
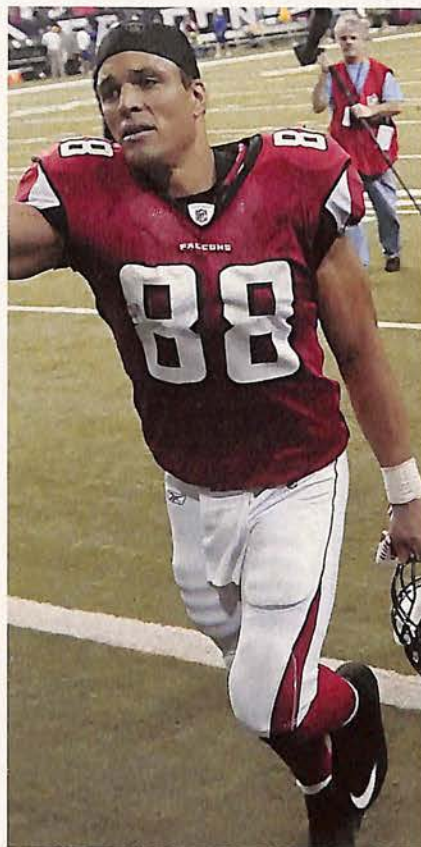
GONZALEZ: In 2003, we had a really good team in Kansas City, when we went 13-3. But, honestly, my rookie year (1997) was probably my best team. We went 13-3, and we had a team that was balanced offensively and defensively.

REED: Two years ago, the team that lost to Pittsburgh in the AFC championship game. We also had a great year (2006) when we went 13-3 with Steve McNair as our quarterback. We should've at least made it to the Super Bowl one of those years.

TAYLOR: We had a lot of good teams in Miami. Maybe the best one was Dan Marino's last season (1999). We had five straight years where we made the playoffs and never got past the second round. That was one of them.

SN: How long does it take to get over a playoff loss?

GONZALEZ: It's devastating. After the playoff loss in 2003, I was distraught. I



The Falcons' Gonzalez, the Ravens' Reed and the Jets' Taylor have completed a combined 34 seasons without making a Super Bowl.

remember being interviewed after the game, and I barely held it together. You put so much into it, and you have so many high expectations. You just try to come back stronger.

REED: It varies by the season. It really hurt when we lost in the AFC championship game. That was probably the worst. They all hurt, and I remember every one of them. Moments like that make me stronger, and they're part of what keeps me playing, keeps me motivated.

TAYLOR: Whenever you realize the Super Bowl is no longer a possibility, whether it's Week 12 or after you lose in the playoffs, it hurts. It's like you have to start all over again.

SN: Do you take care of your body differently now than you did 10 years ago?

GONZALEZ: I'm big into nutrition now. That's become a key part of my whole preparation, making sure I'm putting the right foods and fluid into my body. I think that's a big reason I'm still able to play at a pretty high level.

REED: I have to pay more attention to the places where I've had major injuries, like the surgical spot on my hip, the impingement in my neck. And those late nights out hurt you. Partying hurts you. I used to go out a little bit when I was younger. Not anymore. I learned.

TAYLOR: This is the first year that I've become a big massage guy. I get them regularly, and they help. It's made a difference. I feel terrific.

SN: None of your coaches has won a Super Bowl as a head coach. Why do you believe in them?

GONZALEZ: I think this team has the best mindset of any team I've ever been on. Everyone is focused. Coach (Mike) Smith has a great feel for when it's time to go to work and when it's time to have fun. He stays on an even keel, and so do we.

REED: Coach (John) Harbaugh understands us, and we understand him. It's a good fit, a very good fit.

TAYLOR: What's not to like about playing for Rex (Ryan)? He makes it fun, and it's crystal clear what our

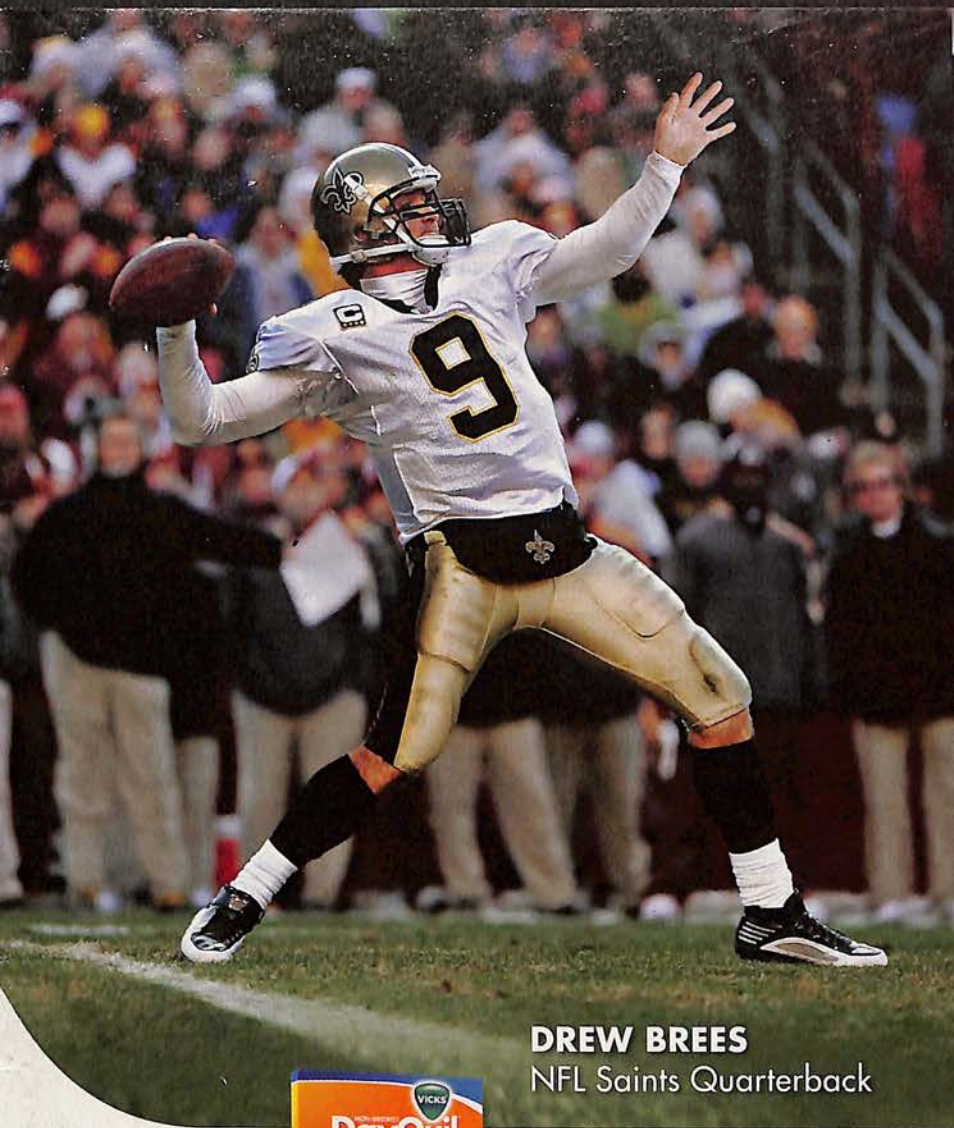
goal is: to win the Super Bowl. Some coaches are afraid to say it. He's not, and that instills confidence. If your goal isn't to win the Super Bowl, why are you playing?

SN: If you don't win a Super Bowl this season, is there another player you'd like to see win one?

GONZALEZ: Tony Richardson of the Jets. He's been around 17 years, he's had a great career, he's one of my best friends. I joke with him (that) if we make it to the Super Bowl and if he makes it, that'd be great.

REED: Michael Vick. I'm rooting for that guy. Yeah, he's done some things that were wrong, and he paid a price for it. But he's bounced back tremendously, with a big heart. For him to go through what he has, if we're not the team, then I hope it's his year.

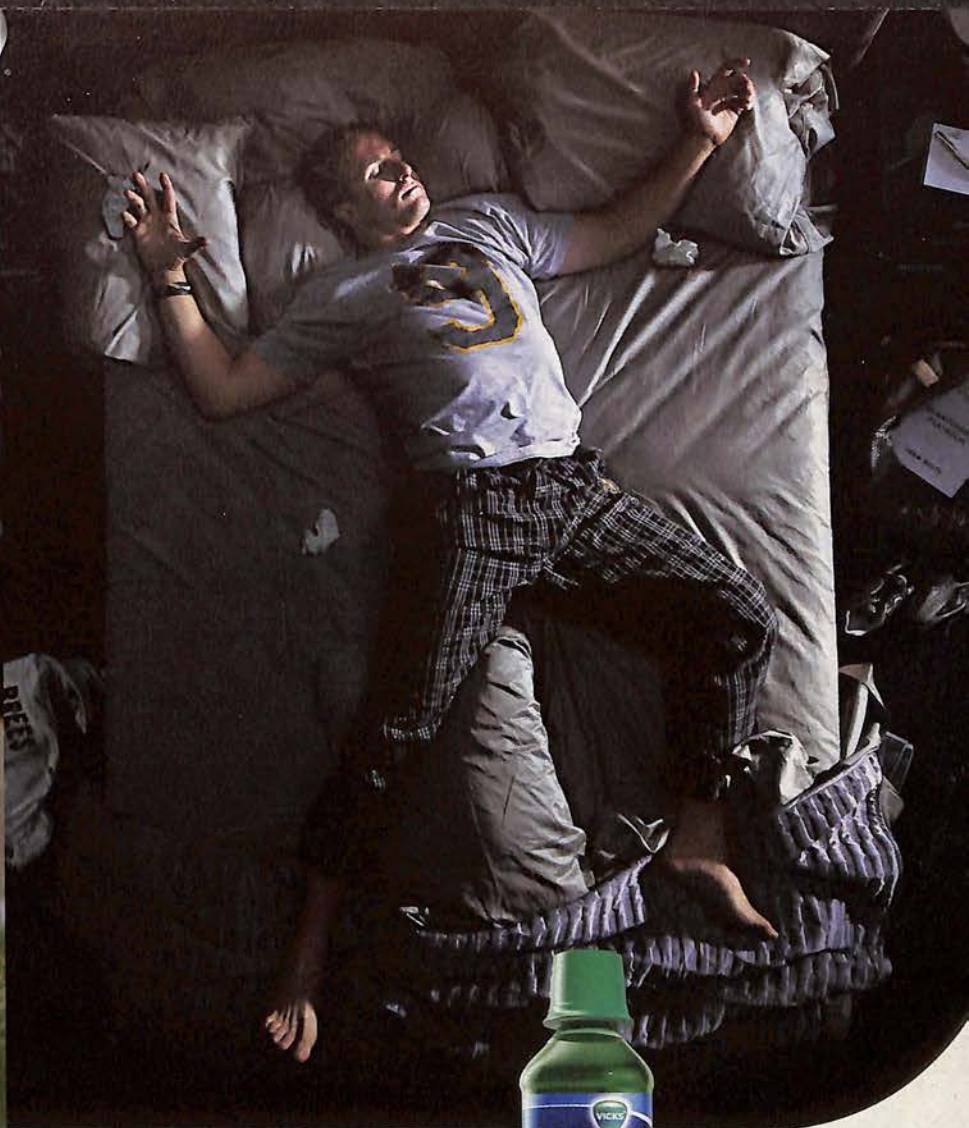
TAYLOR: I'd say LaDainian Tomlinson, but he's my teammate, so if I don't win it, he can't win it either. So I can't answer that question. I'm totally selfish this year about winning the Super Bowl.



DREW BREES
NFL Saints Quarterback



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It's not 2007 again for the Pats, but it's close

By Dennis Dillon
ddillon@sportingnews.com

This year's Patriots offense isn't as dominant as its 2007 predecessor. It just seems that way.

The '07 Patriots scored an NFL-record 589 points—quarterback Tom Brady's 50 touchdown passes and wide receiver Randy Moss' 23 touchdown receptions also were records—on the way to a regular-season record 16 wins and a spot in Super Bowl 42.

This year's offense has forged its own identity in helping New England to an 11-2 record and another playoff berth.

"I think we're different in a lot of ways (from '07)," says wide receiver Wes Welker, who leads the Patriots with 80 catches for 787 yards. "We just play to our strengths and make sure we're moving the ball down the field and try to make plays as we go."

Once again, they have all the right pieces:

A premier quarterback. Just when you think Brady, in his 11th season, can't get any better, he does. In his past five games, he has completed 118 of 164 passes for 1,572 yards and 15 touchdowns. He has thrown 268 straight passes without an interception.

"Tom Brady is the best QB in the league," Bears linebacker Brian Urlacher said after Brady shredded his defense for 369 yards and two TDs in a 36-7 Week 14 victory. "We knew it coming in, and this game just confirmed it."

Brady's bunch. When Brady drops back to pass, he has more options than a vegan at a produce stand. He can throw to Welker or Deion Branch, both veteran receivers. Or he can pick out younger speedster Brandon Tate.



New England's offense gives Brady plenty of options.

Finally, there are Aaron Hernandez and Rob Gronkowski, his two rookie tight ends.

They all make plays, starting with Welker and Branch, who has lifted the receiving corps to a different level since he arrived in a midseason trade.

"They are very dependable, tough, disciplined, smart, skilled receivers," Brady says. "Deion makes incredible catches. Wes makes some great catches. I think they complement each other pretty well."

The ground game. Since Pro Bowl guard Logan Mankins returned from a holdout in Week 9, the offensive line has jelled. Running backs BenJarvus Green-Ellis and Danny Woodhead are keeping defenses off-balance, combining for 1,162 yards.

"We're just working hard and doing our jobs," Green-Ellis says.

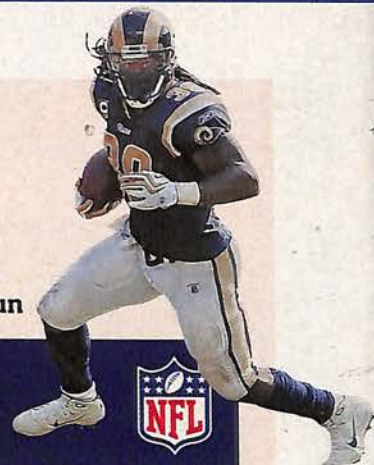
The goal this time is more than a Super Bowl spot—it's a Super Bowl win.

My Favorite Play



By Steven Jackson
Rams running back

The Rams call it: 95 weak
You know it as: An inside zone run



You know, I have a couple of plays I really like. But I think my favorite play, if the game is on the line, is called 95 weak. It's a weakside run with a lead blocker, which for us is fullback Mike Karney. The guard and the tackle are one-on-one with D-linemen, leaving Karney on the Will linebacker since we're running weakside. So on that side of the line, it's a three-man on three-man blocking play.

One of the reasons I like it is because it gives me the flexibility of reading from the offensive line's blocks to the fullback's block on the linebacker. And with it being a weakside run, it's not as crowded as when

you run on the strong side with the tight end over there. I've made a lot of yardage on that run over the years, and it continues to be one of my favorites.

It's a zone run. For any back, not just myself, when you say zone run, that means you have certain reads. And depending on what the defense does, you react accordingly. So you get a little freedom there, a little flexibility. There's not really one particular play or even one particular game where that run stands out. Because I've run it a ton—a ton—of times. I've "rolled the dice" (my TD celebration) a few times after that one.

— As told to Jim Thomas

Professional admiration: 6 rookies opponents will respect come playoff time

ERIC BERRY, SS, CHIEFS

○ **Jaguars TE Marcedes Lewis** says: "He's fluid in and out of his breaks, with good hips and good size (6-0, 211), so he's able to match up on tight ends when they have him cover in man. (His) upside is big. If I was comparing him to anybody, it'd probably be Sean Taylor, just a little bit shorter."

ROB GRONKOWSKI AND AARON HERNANDEZ, TEs, PATRIOTS

○ **Browns FS Mike Adams** says: "They block well. They look like pure receivers. They seem so mature. I don't know if that's from being around (Tom) Brady or what. Hernandez is going to be a real good receiver. He reminds me of Kellen Winslow."

JASON PIERRE-PAUL, DE, GIANTS

○ **Redskins OT Stephon Heyer** says: "He's an athletic guy, and it looks like he has a motor like the rest of their front four. He still has a lot of work to do—to be able to flip his hips and work his leverage with his hands—but he's going to be a good player."

MAURKICE POUNCEY, C, STEELERS

○ **Bills NT Kyle Williams** says: "Obviously, he plays hard and stays after guys. He's doing a good job of getting guys in the right spots and communicating with the line, which is big. He's got a great future."

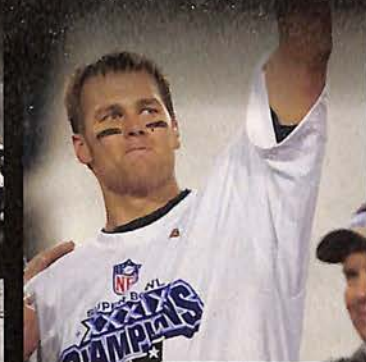
SEAN WEATHERSPOON, OLB, FALCONS

○ **Bucs coach Raheem Morris** says: "He plays with a lot of energy. He's a striker. And he's really got a chance to be one of those guys that we talk about for a long time in this league if he does the right thing."

— Roy Cummings, Steve Doerschuk, Gene Frenette, John Keim, Allen Wilson



SN 125TH ANNIVERSARY



WINNING

ISN'T EVERYTHING, IT'S THE ONLY THING. - **VINCE LOMBARDI**



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SN'S TOP 10 GREATEST NFL TEAMS: COMING 1.17.11

Nobody said replacing LeBron would be easy

The first season of the post-LeBron James era got off to a generally positive start for the Cavaliers but recently has taken a turn for the worse. An Eastern Conference scout—and the Cavs themselves—looked at three ways Cleveland needs to improve:

1. Scout says: “They have some offensive potential, and (coach) Byron Scott has been trying to get them to run, but they need to improve on defense first.”

PG Mo Williams says: “We need to be an uptempo team. ... I don’t think we can stop playing that way, but it becomes easier if we can force turnovers, get rebounds and start running. It’s got to start at the defensive end.”

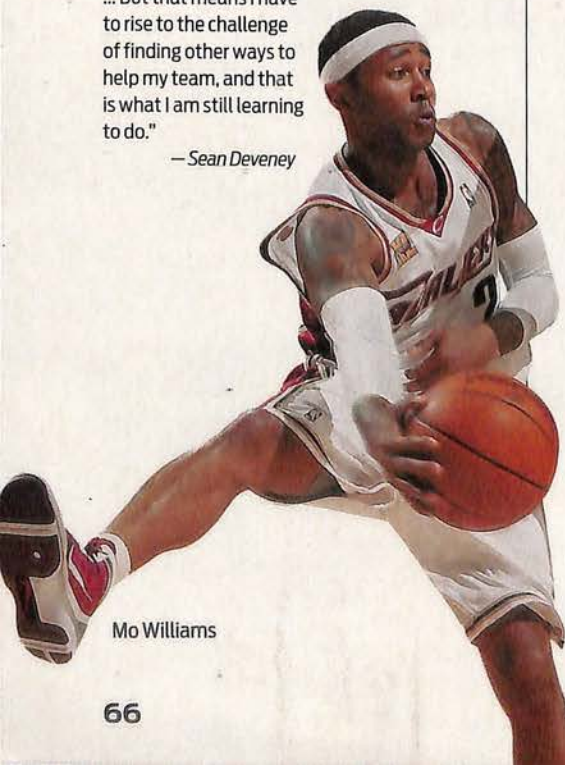
2. Scout says: “You’re obviously not going to replace LeBron James, but they have three guys (Jamario Moon, Joey Graham, Jawad Williams), and one of those guys needs to step up in that spot.”

SF Jawad Williams says: “We’ve all been a little up and down. We’ve all been fighting for the minutes. No excuses, though, we all need to play better.”

3. Scout says: “J.J. Hickson has to be a key ingredient for them going forward, and his efforts have been too inconsistent.”

PF J.J. Hickson says: “There are nights when the defense is focused on me and they are trying to take me out of the game plan. ... But that means I have to rise to the challenge of finding other ways to help my team, and that is what I am still learning to do.”

— Sean Deveney



Mo Williams

New York, New York: Who needs Melo more?

For Knicks president Donnie Walsh, there are no regrets. For two years, he patiently whittled away at his payroll, sending away talented players in exchange for replacements with short contracts who could provide cap space to be used to sign free agents during the summer of 2010. He didn’t get the big prize—LeBron James—but he did get power forward Amare Stoudemire and point guard Raymond Felton. “I felt my major job was to get the cap in order,” Walsh says. “It is now in order, next year and the year after. No matter what happens, that is there.”

Just across the Hudson River, the Nets took a similar approach, clearing cap space in order to rope in a major player last summer. They, too, failed to land the big prize, and now both teams are struggling to stay relevant. “I don’t think anyone feels like we are all that far away,” Nets forward Travis Outlaw says. “Maybe just two or even one player.”

For both the Knicks and the Nets, that is where Nuggets small forward Carmelo Anthony, who’ll be a free agent next summer, comes in. Both teams have made credible pitches to the Nuggets and expect to be involved in talks for Anthony until the February trading deadline. But other teams (the Mavericks and Bulls, for example) could get involved, too. So the NBA’s biggest market may again miss out on the best player available.

Should Anthony wind up outside the New York area, it would be a setback for the Knicks and the Nets—but compare the teams’ situations, and one clearly needs him more than the other.

TALENT

As one Eastern Conference scout says, “The Knicks are, at this point, the better team on paper. They’ve got a big man (Stoudemire) and a decent point guard (Felton), plus some depth with guys like (Danilo Gallinari and (Wilson) Chandler.”

EDGE: KNICKS

YOUTH

The Nets’ top player is center Brook Lopez, who is 22 years old and is joined in the frontcourt by promising 19-year-old rookie power forward Derrick Favors. The Nets are likely to add a lottery pick this season, but the Knicks traded away 2009 top pick Jordan Hill as well as their picks in last year’s and this year’s drafts. **EDGE: NETS**

SALARY CAP SPACE

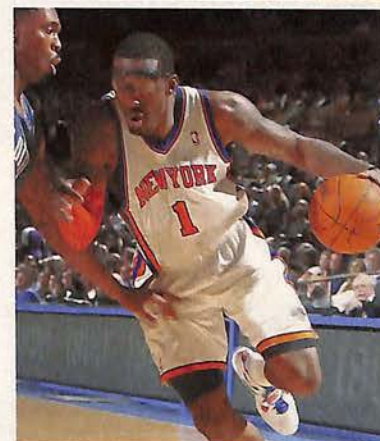
The Nets could have about \$19 million available next summer, and the Knicks could have about \$14 million. **EDGE: NETS**

FRANCHISE SITUATION

The Knicks have Madison Square Garden. The Nets are intriguing to players because they have a new owner, Russian billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov, and though they will play one more season in Newark, they will soon move into a sparkling new arena in Brooklyn. **EDGE: NETS**

OUTLOOK

The Knicks are better than the Nets right now, but they’re still likely to be an also-ran in the East. With fewer draft picks, fewer young players and less cap space, they need a star



The Knicks signed a big-time free agent in Stoudemire, but the Nets are in position to continue to build with young players such as Favors (top).

like Anthony in the worst way. If he passes on the Big Apple altogether and winds up as a Bull or a Maverick or—perish the thought—a Nugget, the Nets can continue to build with youth and draft picks. The Knicks, though, have painted themselves into a corner and need to make a move for a big-time player. But there won’t be any players with names as big as Anthony’s available for a while.

— Sean Deveney

The Nuggets ‘don’t worry about it’



With coach George Karl coming back from cancer treatments, star Carmelo Anthony on the trading block and injuries to big men Kenyon Martin and Chris Andersen, it has been a trying year in Denver. But the Nuggets remain in the thick of the playoff race, and point guard Chauncey Billups explained why:

It’s been difficult. But when they throw that ball up, you realize that

whatever is going on off the court doesn’t matter. I am sure there are a lot of teams that wouldn’t be able to continue on the same pace with all the adversity we have surrounding our team—whether it’s Coach or Melo or all the injuries. I am sure it would be tough for a lot of teams.

What has been good for us is that it hasn’t been a problem inside the locker room. It’s not like we are sitting around talking about it. We don’t

have team meetings; we don’t worry about it. You have to give a lot of credit to Melo for that, too, because he is out there every game, grinding and playing hard.

We’ll get even better. We still are figuring out who we are. We have not been 100 percent healthy. If we can get everyone back, talentwise, we have a team that can compete at a high level.

— As told to Sean Deveney

The Kemba Walker growth chart

By any measure, UConn's star guard is coming up huge

By Mike DeCourcy

decourcy@sportingnews.com

Kemba Walker did not return to Connecticut from his USA Basketball adventure with any outrageous stories about undressing Derrick Rose with a crossover move or stealing the ball and a smidge of dignity from Russell Westbrook.

"The most I could say is there were times when we kept up with those guys," Walker says, and this lack of grandiosity stands as the only disappointment from his time as a practice player challenging the eventual FIBA World Champions.

Because he did return to the Huskies as a superstar. Whether it was the sessions in Las Vegas and New York battling against the U.S. men's national team, the hours spent in a gym shooting jump shots with Huskies graduate manager Ben Wood or the accumulation of lessons from UConn coach Jim Calhoun, Walker dominated the first month of the season like no one else.

His 30-point average at the Maui Invitational led the Huskies to three victories—including stunning wins over Michigan State and Kentucky—and a position in the ESPN/USA Today coaches top 10. This was kind of a big deal, given that UConn barely made the top 10 in the Big East preseason coaches poll.

Walker is not surprised at this success. "Nah, not at all," he says. "It's what we worked for. We have a Hall of Fame coach. He knows what he's doing, and we're buying into what he's doing and it pays off for us."

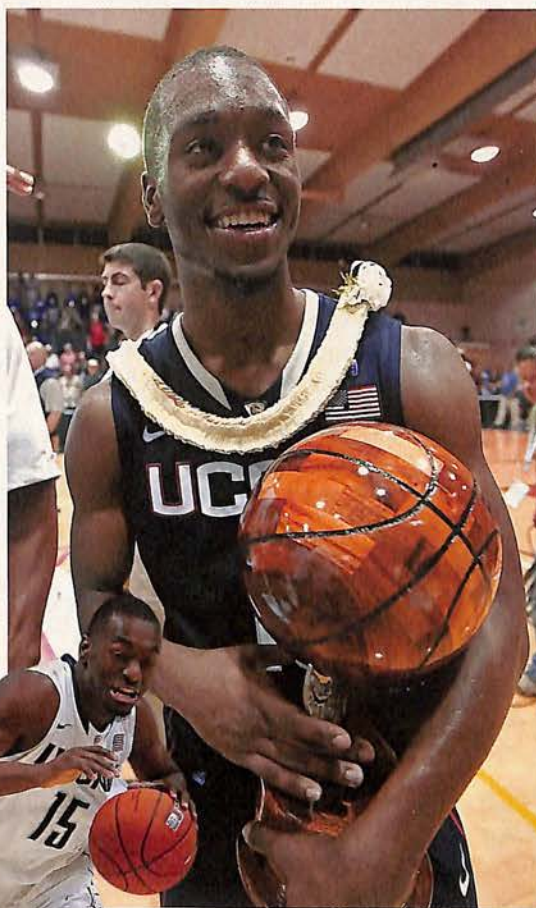
It was hard enough to guard Walker when his primary weapon was the quickness that allows him to penetrate defenses at will, but his improvement as a perimeter shooter has made it almost unfair. He hit 33.9 percent of his 3-pointers last season; this season, he's at 42.6 percent.

Walker's growth chart as a collegian is similar to his rapid ascent as a novice in the game. A native of the Bronx, he did not begin playing seriously until the eighth grade, having spent his younger years as a serious student of hip-hop dance.

"He was always graceful. His footwork was impeccable," says Moe Hicks, Walker's coach at Rice High in Manhattan and now director of basketball operations at St. John's. "When I saw him play, you could tell he had some type of skill."

"His sophomore year, he was coming off the bench behind Edgar Sosa (who went on to play at Louisville). He was starting to get better playing against Sosa every day in practice, and Sosa got in foul trouble in the state championship game. He came in and just sparked us. We just saw a flash of greatness right there in that game."

One of the first college coaches to spot that talent, Cincinnati's Mick Cronin, says he always believed



In one short offseason, Walker went from caretaker to superstar.

Walker would be extraordinary.

"You couldn't stay in front of him," Cronin says. "Plus, he has great character. He's an unbelievable kid."

As a freshman at UConn, Walker was a change-of-pace player, mostly coming off the bench behind A.J. Price and Craig Austrie and averaging 25.2 minutes and 8.9 points for a Final Four squad.

Though he inherited the starting point guard job as a sophomore, he was unable to take complete command of a veteran team that never really had the right chemistry. With Walker now surrounded by four freshmen and one sophomore among UConn's top players, there is no question who is in charge.

"It's a lot easier," he says. "A lot of the guys look up to me, come to me for advice. It's a good feeling. They don't really know any better. And they're going to play hard every night."

"I just knew it was going to be a different year for us."

Big conferences, big games

Six early league contests you shouldn't miss

With the way conference schedules work now, it's possible for some of the best leagues to slip in some of their biggest games before anyone sees them coming.

So consider this a sort of holiday shopping guide to the best early league games in the BCS conferences:

ACC: Miami at Duke,

January 2. If any team goes into Cameron and beats the Blue Devils, it will have achieved this season's biggest upset. But with the shortage of actual challengers comes a shortage of compelling conference games. The Hurricanes at least have some gravitas after beating West Virginia.

Big East: Connecticut at Pitt,

December 27. When Huskies coach Jim Calhoun began complaining about this game's timing, it seemed to most everyone else not to matter. Wasn't it obvious UConn was going to take a road beating on its way to finishing 10th? Now, it looms as one of the biggest games on the conference schedule.

Big Ten: Minnesota at Michigan State, December 31.

The Gophers begin their conference schedule with not only this trip but a visit to Wisconsin three days earlier. They could be out of the conference race by the time that big glitter ball drops on Times Square—or in complete command with two stout road wins.

Big 12: Kansas State at Oklahoma State, January 8.

This conference will be better next season with 10 teams playing an 18-game round robin schedule. But for now, try finding a truly tasty league game near the start. While others are charging into their schedules, the Big 12 seems to be hitting the snooze button.

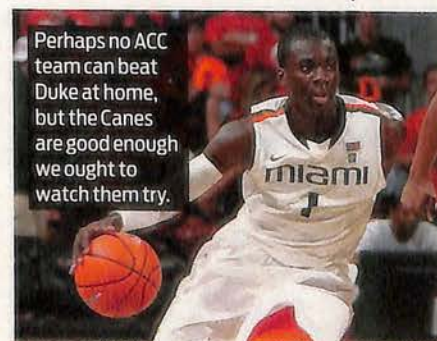
Pac-10: Washington at UCLA, December 31.

The Bruins need to grow up, but they do seem to get up for their biggest games. They'll have none bigger at Pauley this season than against UW.

SEC: Florida at Tennessee,

January 11. With the exception of the Vols, most SEC teams spent the season's first month suggesting why they won't be title contenders. Florida figured to be a factor entering the season. This is a fine opportunity to reinforce that belief.

—Mike DeCourcy



I'll spend the offseason turning winter into summer



Tony Stewart

Last year was a first for me. No, I don't mean being a driver-owner at Stewart-Haas Racing. Yes, that was a first, but the one I'm talking about involved putting the "off" in my offseason for the first time.

Our offseason is the shortest in all of sports. We end the year in Homestead, Fla., the weekend before Thanksgiving. We have Thanksgiving off, but then the next week and weekend is spent out in Las Vegas at the NASCAR awards banquet.

There are normally a handful of odds and ends that you need to take care of afterward: photo shoots, Christmas parties, etc., but come that second full week in December, you try to check out because you know that as soon as New Year's Day is over, you're back at it—hard. Our first preseason test is January 20-22 at Daytona (Fla.) International Speedway, and then we start racing at Daytona for real three weeks later.

So, last year I got smart—and a little adventurous. I spent three weeks down in Australia racing and having fun. Best thing I could've ever done.

I had been to Australia before in 1995, but I knew that going back I'd need a tour guide, and there's none better than my own World of Outlaws driver, Donny Schatz. Donny had run down there for the previous 12 years, and in addition to being my tour guide, he was my teammate. We found a way to get some racing in, this time with winged sprint cars. We landed just a few days before Christmas and enjoyed the sights and sounds of summer before heading to "work" at Tyrepower Parramatta City Raceway, a half-mile dirt oval located just outside of Sydney.

I ended up racing four nights. We had planned for five nights, but one of the races got rained out. I was terrible the first night I was there. I was all over the place. The second night was a little better but not much. The last two nights, we got going. We got better every night, so that was the biggest thing for me. I got more confident as the week went on.

That confidence, along with the fact there was a whole lot of fun—which included watching fireworks over the harbor near the Sydney Opera House on New Year's Eve—convinced me I should go back this year, this time for a month. I'll leave December 15 and won't be back until January 15.

It was an easy decision to stay for that long. After all, it's summer in Australia when it's winter here. And as anyone from Indiana or the Midwest can attest, winter can be brutal. Why not escape to where it's warm and do some racing at the same time? It'll be fun, and I'll come back tan, relaxed and ready for Daytona.

Tony Stewart, a two-time season champion in NASCAR's Cup Series, is a regular contributor to Sporting News.



Schatz (left) is Stewart's tour guide when he visits Australia.



Knaus is always looking to improve—which has led to five straight titles.

'They know it's never good enough'



Chad Knaus just won his fifth straight Sprint Cup title as Jimmie Johnson's crew chief, but he's already thinking about No. 6: **Ray Evernham**, who won two titles as crew chief with Jeff Gordon's original

Rainbow Warriors pit crew—on which Knaus was a tire changer—talked to *Sporting News* about what keeps Knaus and his No. 48 crew motivated and hungry.

Chad probably watched me fry myself to a frazzle and everything else, and he's figured out how to keep himself fresh, his team fresh.

The job creates a lot of that persona for you. There's times I'll guarantee you Chad would like to be more relaxed and say, "God almighty, don't worry about the pop rivet being in the right place." But he can't. He has to make sure that the creases are perfect in the pants, the pop rivets are in line, the truck is polished—he's got to be walking around there constantly with his eyes open saying, "I don't like that decal; it's crooked."

That creates a mindset through the whole rest of the team that they know it's never good enough. There's always some way to improve, and that's a tremendous amount of pressure to remain that intense. That's the thing I give him the most credit for.

—Reid Spencer

1 Question, 3 Answers: What's up with the Hendrick shakeup?

Two days after Jimmie Johnson won his fifth straight Sprint Cup championship—and the 10th overall for Hendrick Motorsports—owner Rick Hendrick announced a major realignment of his driver-crew chief combinations. Dale Earnhardt Jr. is now a shopmate of Johnson's and will work with Steve Letarte, Jeff Gordon's crew chief since late 2005. Gordon will be paired with Alan Gustafson (Mark Martin's crew chief

for two years), and Martin is with Lance McGrew, who had been Earnhardt's crew chief since June 2009. *Sporting News* asked three men with a vested interest what they think of the new combinations.

☛ **Gordon:** "This is a move that can elevate our whole organization. If we're going to win more championships—especially with the No. 24

team—things like this, led by Rick, these types of decisions are what get you there."

☛ **Johnson:** "If we can have all four cars winning races, making the Chase and fighting for the championship, it's only going to make us better. So I'm excited, I'm hopeful. It makes sense, although I'm nervous because we won't know what the effects will be until we get into the heart of the season and race for a while."

☛ **Chad Knaus, Johnson's crew chief:** "Each driver has his own charisma and dynamic about him, along with the crew chiefs. It'll be interesting to see how Stevie (Letarte), who's a very extroverted person—open, communicates very, very well—and Dale, who's a little bit more reserved, can communicate. I think it could really be neat."

—Reid Spencer



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Lowdown from a Legend



Former Rangers defenseman and Hall of Famer **Brian Leetch** shares his thoughts on today's NHL:

⊙ **Player who plays like I did:** "I have always thought (Sharks defenseman) Dan Boyle's style is very similar to the way I saw the game and played. I think we are about the same size and I like the way he approaches the game. He takes chances offensively when the opportunity is there and doesn't force it unless the team is behind by a few goals or it's late in the game."

⊙ **Current coach I'd like to play for:** "I can't really pick one coach. Many teams are playing an aggressive forechecking system now and encouraging their D-men to get involved in the play, which is a style that I always thought suited my game best."

⊙ **Player from my era who would have excelled today:** "Mario Lemieux would be scary in today's game. His size, skating and passing ability—combined with how he saw the game—would give him a chance to get back to that 200-point mark."

⊙ **What I miss most about playing:** "I miss the responsibility that comes with playing a lot of minutes and being able to help my teammates be successful. There's nothing better than coming into a winning locker room and being able to share in that feeling for the next hour."

⊙ **One change I'd make:** "I would get rid of touch icing. I see too much risk to the players (especially defensemen). Just blow the whistle as soon as the puck crosses the line."

— Craig Custance



Leetch says the style of play in today's NHL would have suited his game.

Fits and misses: evaluating five new coaches

By Craig Custance

ccustance@sportingnews.com

There was nothing Scott Arniel could do but wait. Columbus general manager Scott Howson told Arniel he'd call on Monday and let him know if he would become the new coach of the Columbus Blue Jackets.

So Arniel, then coach of the AHL's Manitoba Moose, spent the weekend fishing.

By the time he sat down at his desk to wait for the call on Monday morning, he had heard the rumors: Guy Boucher was Howson's choice.

The phone rang, and Arniel braced for bad news.

"There were lots of rumors. At the end of the day, whatever his decision was, obviously he had something else in his back pocket," Arniel says.

The news wasn't bad. Just the opposite.

The Columbus job was his.

To this day, Boucher won't publicly say whether he was offered the Columbus job. But two days after Arniel joined the Blue Jackets on June 8, Boucher accepted an offer from new Tampa Bay G.M. Steve Yzerman to coach the Lightning.

So far, those hires are working for everyone. Arniel has the Blue Jackets looking more like the team that earned its first playoff berth two seasons ago. In Tampa, the 39-year-old Boucher has lived up to expectations as the NHL's next great young coach.

Arniel laughs when asked if he ever looks at the standings to check Boucher's success. Sure, he says, sometimes. But most of his focus is on the Blue Jackets, and they've been everything he expected.

He took the job because he liked the leadership of Rick Nash. He liked the goaltending duo of Steve Mason and Mathieu Garon. And he liked the talented young core group of Derick Brassard, Kris Russell and Jakub Voracek.

Brassard is quick to credit Arniel for his—and the team's—early success.

"It's totally different than last year. His communication is way different," Brassard says. "His door is always open, and that's really key. It's been fun."

— A look at the four other offseason coaching hires:

Guy Boucher, Lightning

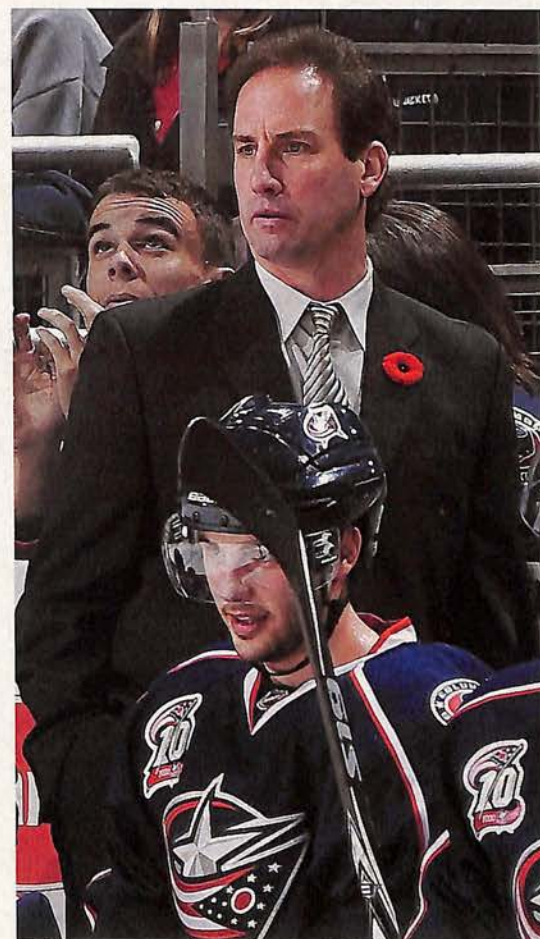
⊙ **The fit:** Ideal. Yzerman is trying to build a winning culture, and Boucher has emerged as the right coach to cultivate success.

⊙ **Early returns:** Boucher is a master at connecting with players, be it a veteran like Martin St. Louis or an emerging superstar like Steven Stamkos. "I coach people, I don't coach systems," Boucher says. "The collective part of the game is important, but the reality is the collective part is you're taking care of individuals."

Craig Ramsay, Thrashers

⊙ **The fit:** Perfect. G.M. Rick Dudley knew what he was getting with Ramsay, and the veteran coach hasn't let him down.

⊙ **Early returns:** Dudley ignored the trend of hiring hot AHL candidates, turning instead to the former Bruins assistant. Ramsay has guided the Thrashers into the Eastern Conference playoff race, and he has done it without Ilya Kovalchuk, who was traded to the Devils last season. "What we're trying to do here is, we don't pigeonhole anybody," Ramsay says. "We tell everybody they have to score a goal and to do something offensively. I expect more."



Through the first part of the season, it looks like the Blue Jackets made the right choice in hiring Arniel.

John MacLean, Devils

⊙ **The fit:** Questionable. Kovalchuk isn't easy to coach, and MacLean might not be right for the job.

⊙ **Early returns:** MacLean's honeymoon didn't last long. A slow start by Kovalchuk, plus injuries to key players Zach Parise and Martin Brodeur, hasn't helped. G.M. Lou Lamoriello doesn't have a history of patience with head coaches, and each loss brings more speculation MacLean will be replaced.

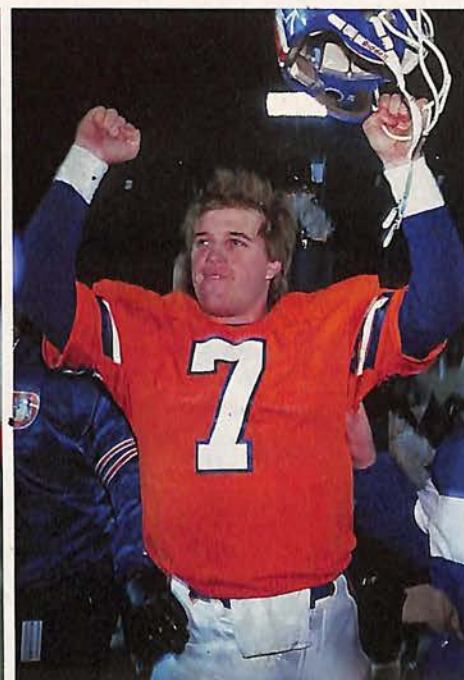
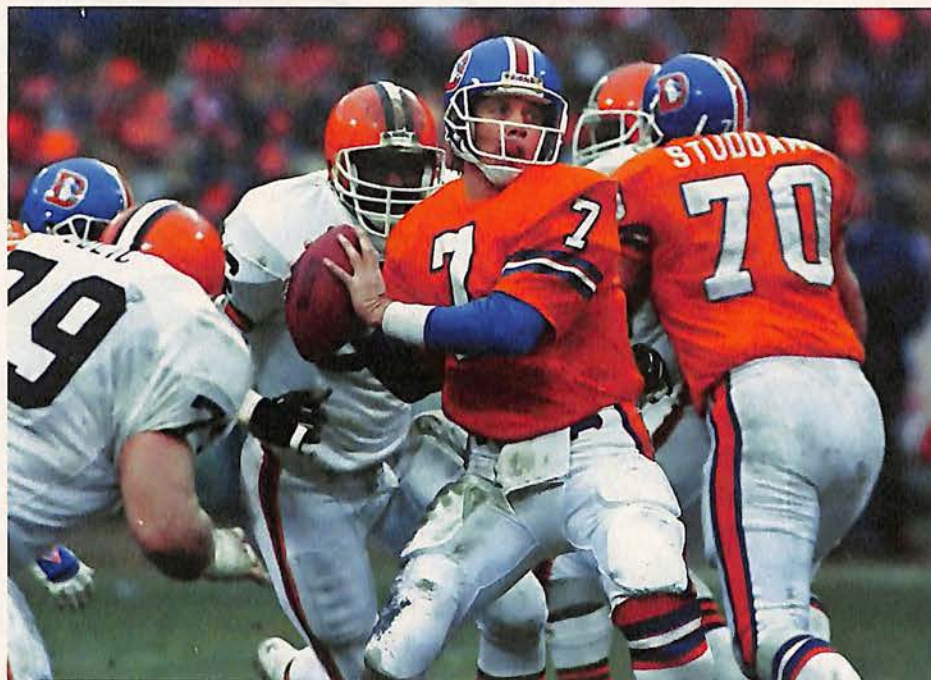
Tom Renney, Oilers

⊙ **The fit:** Solid. The rebuilding Oilers need a coach with patience, something Renney provides.

⊙ **Early returns:** This isn't a playoff team, but the young Oilers continue to show progress. Like Boucher, Renney is depending on strong communication with young talents like Taylor Hall and Jordan Eberle. "You give them opportunity, you give them feedback. You allow them to participate in that," Renney says. "You want to hear what they're thinking, what they're hearing, what they're feeling so you can make educated choices for them moving forward."

I REMEMBER ...

John Elway Hall of Fame QB



ON THE RECEIVING END



Broncos rookie wideout **Mark Jackson** hauled in the two biggest receptions of The Drive, a 20-yard grab on third-and-18 and, of course, the game-tying touchdown with 37 seconds left in regulation. Jackson talked with *Sporting News* about his memories of the comeback.

Every year, The Drive gets longer and longer. Now it's 98-and-a-half yards; by the time I have grandchildren, it'll be 102 yards.

I remember watching the news the night before the game while I was lying in bed, and they showed all these different outlets giving away free dog biscuits. People were coming in by droves to pick up bags of them. I thought that was pretty cool, actually. Until game day, when I realized they were bringing those dog biscuits to the game to hurl at us. That's when I thought, *This is crazy*.

That whole end zone down there by the Dawg Pound was covered in dog biscuits. After that touchdown, you could hear pins drop in the stadium, which was a pretty unique thing because that particular touchdown was right there in the end zone where the Dawg Pound was. There were some Broncos fans there, my parents and about 18 other of my family members. I think they were afraid to cheer pretty much throughout the game, but they couldn't really hold it at that time.

— As told to Ryan Fagan

Ninety-eight yards—and a bashing, brutal Cleveland Browns defense—stood between John Elway's Broncos and a trip to the Super Bowl. But on January 11, 1987, those 98 yards weren't nearly enough, as the Broncos tied the AFC

championship game on a 5-yard touchdown strike from Elway to wideout Mark Jackson with 37 seconds left. The Drive created a legend and thrust a franchise into rarefied air. More than two decades later, the legend shared his side of the story with *Sporting News*.



The Dawg Pound hounded Elway, now 50, and the Broncos during the AFC title game—but his legendary drive was the ultimate silencer.

It was one of those days at Municipal Stadium, like when you watch those old NFL games and Cleveland is playing there on a cold day, those days where you can see everybody's breath. When we finally got on the field for that drive, it had been a dogfight the whole day. There were 5 minutes to go, and we were just thinking about getting some breathing room because it was first-and-10 on the 2-yard line.

As we started picking up momentum, the stadium—which had been loud the whole game—you could feel the whole stadium kind of taking a breath, thinking, "Oh, what have we gotten ourselves into?" And with each first down we got, the quieter it got, the more confidence we got. It was one of those surreal situations where you weren't thinking too much.

The play of the drive was the third-and-18; I'd been sacked the play before to put us in that situation. We were in shotgun and on a silent count, and we sent Steve Watson in motion. We were running low on the 40-second clock, and he was behind a bit, and as he was passing by, the ball got snapped and actually glanced off his hip. But it didn't catch enough of him and I was able to get the snap and get the ball downfield to Mark Jackson to pick up the first down. I think it was about that point in time that we began to feel pretty good about ourselves.

On the touchdown, we were expecting man coverage and they gave us zone, so the flat guy, who was the first option, wasn't there. Mark was the second. Obviously, being third-and-1,

we were in two-down territory. I didn't really want to throw the ball inside because there's a lot of traffic in there, especially when you're so close to the end zone. But I saw Mark running in there and I knew he was going to have a little seam, so I just put as much heat on it as I could and knew that if he wasn't going to catch it, nobody was. That's the hardest I've ever thrown it. I put it low and he went and got it and scored the touchdown.

At that point, we weren't thinking about what we'd done. The next concern was, after we'd done all that work, was let's make sure we get the extra point. Once that was good, we fed off that 98-yard drive and were able to move it down and kick the field goal in overtime.

— As told to Ryan Fagan

Army-Navy is still the best game going



Acclaimed author John Feinstein has written two books on the Army-Navy game: *A Civil War and the recently published The Rivalry: Mystery at the Army-Navy Game, the fifth in an award-winning series of young adult mysteries. He has done color commentary for the Navy radio network for the past 14 seasons.*

Eleven years ago, before Army and Navy played football against each other for the 100th time, the five men who won Heisman Trophies while playing for the two schools were honored the night before the game. Four of them were in attendance—Army's Doc Blanchard was too ill. They were introduced chronologically: Blanchard, Glenn Davis and Pete Dawkins from Army and then Joe Bellino and Roger Staubach from Navy.

Staubach won his Heisman in 1963, the last year that Army or Navy seriously contended for a national championship. He graduated in 1965 and served in the Navy, including a tour in Vietnam, before joining the Dallas Cowboys in 1969. From there, he beat the long odds against an athlete missing four years by leading the Cowboys to two Super Bowl titles during a Hall of Fame career.

When Staubach spoke that night in Philadelphia, he remembered his first Super Bowl. "I'm not sure I've had a prouder moment in my life than running out of the tunnel and hearing the PA announcer say, 'Starting at quarterback, from the United States Naval Academy,

No. 12, Roger Staubach,'" he said, his voice filling with emotion. "I honestly felt as if I was representing every single person who has ever played in the Army-Navy game. I still feel that way today."

He paused there because he was choking up. But he didn't need to say anything more. The entire room—Army and Navy fans alike—was on its feet cheering him.

To this day, Staubach remains the benchmark at both Army and Navy for a player. Although Staubach is justifiably proud of that legacy, he will tell you emphatically that what makes Army-Navy so special is the quality of the people who play in the game. "Every time I get the chance to talk to the players," he has often said, "I'm reminded of why it means so much to me to say I graduated from Navy. Both schools have had some struggles through the years on the field, but off the field, which is always what matters the most, the young men from the academies never let you down."

Perhaps that sounds corny, especially in an era where the be-all and end-all for most football schools is to find a way to share in the riches of the BCS. College presidents willingly abandon traditions and rivalries of the past in pursuit of every TV or corporate dollar they can scoop up and wink knowingly at one another every time they use the phrase "student-athlete."

You don't hear that term a lot around Army-Navy. It isn't needed. No one needs to jump up and down and claim that these football players are going to class or aren't being paid or aren't already in the back pocket of agents. Here's what passes for trash-talk in the lead up to Army-Navy: "We really owe these guys."

That's what Army players had been saying for eight years leading into this year's game—Navy had won eight straight in the series—and they'll be saying it again. Navy won, 31-17.

Later this month, the Midshipmen will appear in their eighth straight bowl game and the Cadets will play in a bowl for the first time in 14 years. After years

of catastrophic mistakes in choosing an athletic director and football coaches, Army finally got it right two years ago when it hired Rich Ellerson—a coach who understands the option and West Point: His father and two brothers are graduates.

Of course, success at the academies hasn't come at the level it did when Davis and Blanchard were Mr. Outside and Mr. Inside; when Dawkins—who went on to become a general—was a superstar; when Bellino and Staubach were so good that pro teams were willing to wait for them to serve their time in the military and then give them a chance to play. Vietnam changed things, and so did huge NFL salaries, and now Navy's ability to beat Notre Dame three years out of four is viewed (correctly) as one of the great recent achievements in any sport at any level.

Navy and Army have every possible disadvantage a college football program can have—including a five-year postgraduate military commitment that causes almost any high school player with pro aspirations to run for the door.

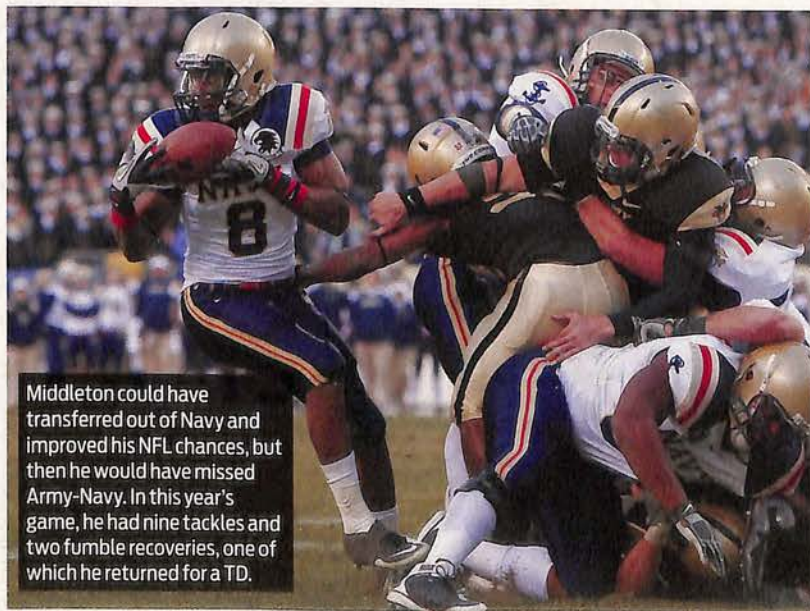
But the players at Army and Navy tend not to run from anything—except would-be tacklers. Senior Wyatt Middleton is Navy's defensive captain this year. By the end of his sophomore season, he was a two-year starter who easily could have transferred to a civilian school and become a starter with the chance of an NFL career waiting when he graduated. His older brother, William, plays for the Jacksonville Jaguars, and if a cadet or midshipman leaves before the start of his junior year, there's no financial penalty, no need to pay back the two years of college provided by the government.

Wyatt Middleton never thought about leaving. Like all the players at Army and Navy, he talks about "the Brotherhood" of the football team and what it means to him. But there was something else that made leaving the academy impossible.

"If I had left," he said, "I would never have played in the Army-Navy game again."

Middleton understands. There is no other game one can play in or coach in or even watch from the sidelines or the stands that feels like Army-Navy.

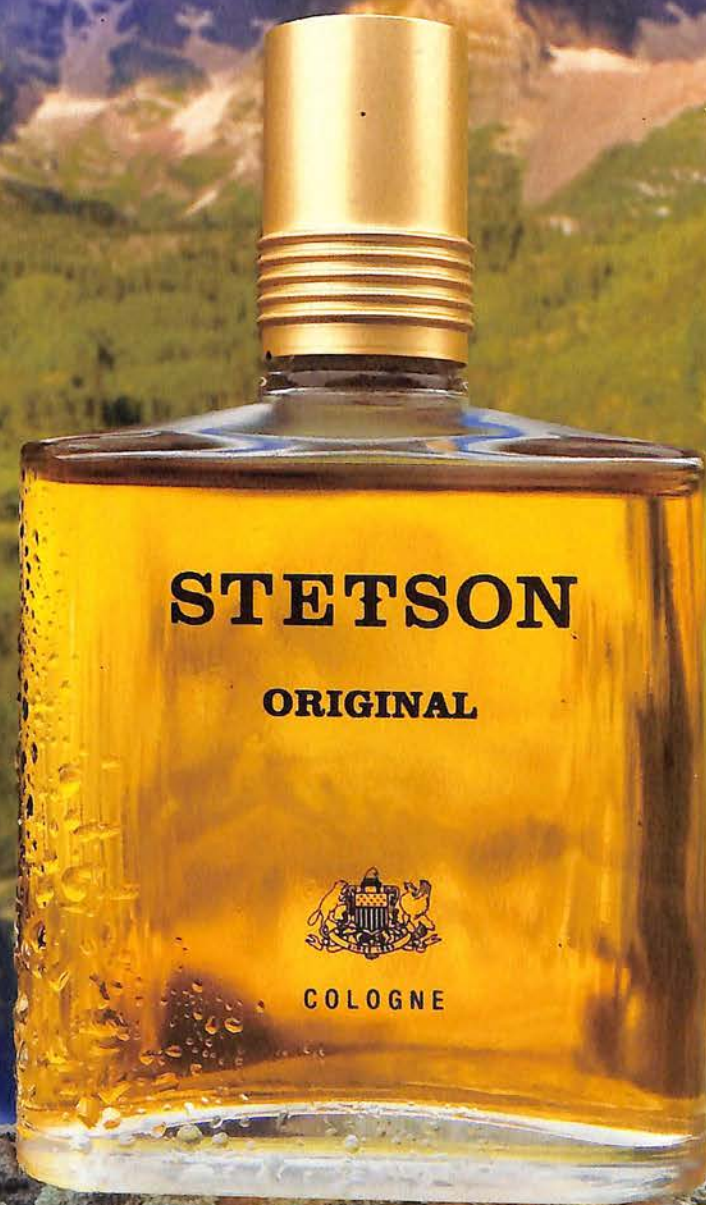
Roger Staubach can still be very proud.



Middleton could have transferred out of Navy and improved his NFL chances, but then he would have missed Army-Navy. In this year's game, he had nine tackles and two fumble recoveries, one of which he returned for a TD.

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